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Sailor's Carol

Lord, the snowful sky
In the pale December
Fingers my clear eye
Lest seeing, I remember

Not the naked baby
Weeping in the stable
Nor the singing boys
All round my table,

Not the dizzy star
Bursting on the pane
Nor the leopard sun
Pawing the rain

Only the deep garden
Where green lilies grow,
The sailors rolling
In the sea's blue snow.

Charles Causley

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argosy

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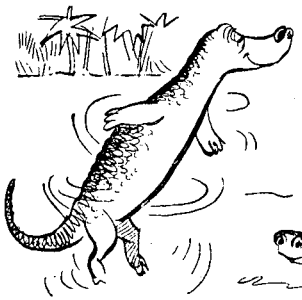
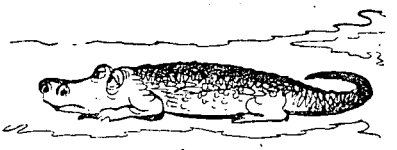


Log Book



WOOING, so tiring," one of the Mitford characters once remarked. But in this respect the human process is completely outclassed by the arduous routines of the animal kingdom. Marine worms—to start at the bottom of the scale—dance in great numbers round the females, hour after hour. Fiddler crabs have one enormous claw with which they laboriously beckon inexperienced young girl crabs into their holes. (" Have some Madeira, me dear.") Jumping spiders dance in a half-circle before their ladies with one pair of brightly coloured legs turned up. Male crocodiles waltz with loud bellowings round the debutantes of the saurian world, exuding a smell of musk and smiling winningly. Crocodiles are such sluggish creatures that it is hard to imagine this being received with enthusiasm.

" Can't you find something a little more up-to-date in the cosmetic line, Fred?" we can hear one of the bored belles remarking, as she turns her back and scoops a slop of mud over her shoulders. " *Manly* men smell of ——."

The quenched cayman slinks off to buy a bottle of Top-tanglow, amid ironic cries from the cay-ladies of, " See you later, alligator."

Peacocks go to immense lengths to interest and amuse their brides, growing those great tails, spreading them out, and rattling the feathers in a moving and meaningful manner—while the peahens, all too probably, are assessing the amount of material in the train, wondering whether it will fade, and if it can be laundered at home or will it have to be sent to the cleaners?

Golden pheasants run round their wives dropping their wings, (" Not on the carpet, dear, *please*, I've just vacuumed it.") The male of the common snipe mounts to a great height in the air and then swoops suddenly down towards the female, letting the wind whistle through his tail-feathers to produce a bleating sound. We are ready to bet that the snipesses, sitting knitting

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on the ground below, are paying little, if any, attention to their spouses, but are chatting about the price of fish, occasionally breaking off to sigh, "*Listen* to Tom! He's been doing that since eight o'clock this morning, making that *same* noise. It's driving me *crazy*. Men! They're no better than big babies."

"Look at me, Minnie!" shouts the male snipe, whistling past.

"Yes, dear, lovely," she says, stifling a yawn with her claw.

Australian bower-birds construct and decorate love-nests on the most elaborate plan, studding them all over with precious stones and little bits of mink and sable. Into these they then chase the females after having lured them with songs:

Won't you come into my bower
For a little half an hour
I wouldn't dream of asking you for more.
You look so sweet and fetching
Won't you come and see my etching
No etcher ever etched such plates before . . .

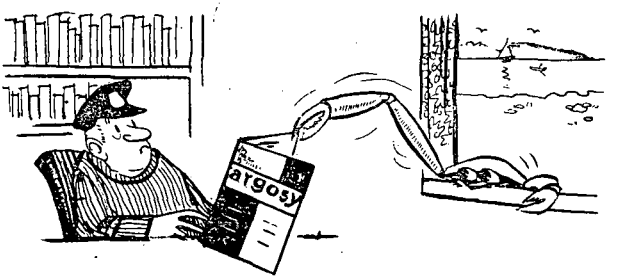
There's going to be a shower
Do come into my bower,
I've lots of gin, there's Welcome on the mat
I'd hate the April weathers
To disarrange your feathers—
We'll simply sit and sip our drinks and chat . . .

Of course once in his bower she's in his power, but the chances are that after a couple of days she's refurnishing the place on more contemporary lines with open-plan rooms and complaining that the stones on the roof are garnets, not rubies.

It's no use; try how he may, the male can't come out the victor, but human males at least have Argosy to be thankful for; if all wiles fail—or if they succeed, which may be just as inconvenient in the end—the weary wooer can always retire to the library with ten absolutely first-class stories to soothe his ruffled feelings.

JOHN SILVER

Horatio



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JOHN WAIN...

Lecturer, novelist, poet, critic, still in his thirties, John Wain has given up academic life to write and travel: his keen eye and quick instinct arrow straight to the heart of things as in this new story.

QUARTER to eight on a Monday morning, well into April but still pretty fresh, and I'm off to a fair start with the collecting. I may be getting on towards retiring age, but I can still get round the boxes as quick as any of them and quicker than most. The secret is to get a move on in the early stages. Get round as many as you can by nine o'clock. After that, the traffic sets in heavy and slows you down so much that you can pretty well reckon to take double time over everything.

This morning I've got one of the light vans and it looks as if I'm getting away easy. I'm round the S.W.15 area, the other side of the river. Nice quiet suburban streets, with trees in fresh bloom. Like a trip to the country. So, of course, I let myself be lulled into feeling optimistic. Forty years with the Post Office and I *still* haven't got it into my head that trouble always hits you when you've got your guard down.

I'm coming up to the third box and even as I drive up to it I can see this girl standing there on the pavement. She's only a couple of yards away from the pillarbox, but my early-warning system still doesn't go off: I think perhaps she's waiting for somebody to come out of one of the houses, some girlfriend she travels to work with, or her little brother that she's seeing to school. Funny joke.

I get out of the van and go over to the box with my bunch of keys and my bag at the ready. And straight away I see that she's watching me. I try to take no notice, but her eyes are boring two holes in the back of my neck.

I open the box and there are the letters. Not many, because most people who post on a Sunday manage to catch the five o'clock collection. About a couple of dozen in all. I'm just sweeping them into the bag when the girl takes a step towards me. I see her out of the corner of my eye and I straighten up. For a moment I wonder if I'm going to be coshed or something. There's a kind of desperation about her. But she's alone, a nice-looking girl, about twenty, good class, well dressed. She's very unhappy, I can see that. All stirred up about something. But it's no business of mine. On the collecting you've no time to

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THE VALENTINE GENERATION

spare before nine o'clock. After that, you might just as well slacken off, that's what I always tell them.

I turn to go back to the van, but she's speaking to me. I don't quite catch what she's saying. She's too confused, the sounds just tumble out over one another.

"Anything wrong, miss?" But as I speak I'm opening the van door. She's not going to hold me up, whatever she wants.

"Yes," she says. "There's something terribly wrong. But you could put it right for me in a minute, if you'd be very kind."

I don't like the sound of that, but she's waiting for me to say something, so I decide to give her one minute of my time. Just one minute. She's in trouble, and I've got daughters of my own.

"What is it I can do for you?" I say. "It'd better be something I can do within sixty seconds, because on this job it's all a question of how much you can do before nine—"

She doesn't let me finish. She's all over me, reaching out as if she wants to grab hold of my arm. "You can, you can easily do it straight away," she says. "It's just that—I've posted a letter that I ought never to have posted. And I want to get it back. If it goes it'll do terrible harm that I could never do anything about. You will give it me, won't you? Please?"

It's a funny thing, but as I stand there listening to her I have a kind of This-is-where-I-came-in feeling. All those years ago, when I first joined the Post Office, I used to wonder if anybody would ever come up to me when I was on collecting and ask me if they could have a letter back. And now at last it's happened. Of course I've always known I couldn't do it.

"Sorry, miss," I say, shaking my head. "Firmest rule in the book. Once a thing's posted, it's in the care of the Post Office until it reaches the party it's addressed to.''

She draws a deep breath and I can see she's getting ready to work hard. "Look—" she begins.

But I'm too quick for her. "No, you look," I say to her. "Forty years I've worked for the Post Office, and all through those forty years it's been my living. A job to do, a wage, pension at the end of it, social club, met most of my friends

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through it. It's like being married. Forty years and you don't even want a change. You can't even imagine it any more."

"Being married!" she says, gulping, as if I'd said something that really hurt her. "I wouldn't know. I've never been married yet, and if you're going to stand on those regulations of yours and refuse to give just one little letter back, just *once* in forty years, I don't suppose I ever shall be."

It's not that I'm heartless, but at that I just have to laugh. "Oh, come *on*," I say to her. "A pretty young thing like you. Never married, that's a laugh!"

"Oh, you're so clever," she says, sad and angry at the same time. "You know everything, don't you? All right, probably if my entire happiness is ruined, I'll get over it one day, enough to marry somebody just for the sake of having a normal life and a family. But I shan't be happy."

"We've all had it," I say. "Nobody in the world's good enough except just one person."

"Don't you believe in love?" she asks.

"Well, as a matter of fact I do," I say. "I got married myself, soon after I joined the Post Office, and I can't believe I'd have been as happy with anyone else as I have with my wife. I did all right when I picked her out. But that was back in the days when marriages were made to last. Everything's different with you young people today."

"You think so?" she says. "Really different?"

"Course it is," I say. "All the romance has gone out of it. Well, look at it. Sex, sex, sex, from morning to night and never a bit of sentiment."

"What's wrong with sex?" she says, looking stubborn.

"Nothing," I say, "only in my day we didn't try to build a fire with nothing but kindling."

I turn away, thinking I'll leave her to chew that one over. I'm just getting the van door open when suddenly she's there, grabbing at my wrist. "Please," she says. "*Please.* You've got a kind face. I know you'd help me if only you knew."

"Well, I haven't got time to know," I say, trying to get free. "I thought you said it would be sixty seconds."

"I wrote a letter to the man I'm in love with," she says, speaking very quickly and holding on to my wrist. "A horrible, hurtful letter telling him I didn't want any more to do with him, and saying a lot of horrible things that weren't even true. Things I just made up to try to hurt him—to make him suffer."

"And now you're sorry for him," I say. "Well, write him another letter and tell him it was all a pack of lies."

"You don't understand," she says. "It isn't that I'm sorry

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for him, it's just that I want him back. And he'll never, *never* come back to me if he reads that letter. He'll never forgive me."

"He will if he loves you," I say.

"Oh, it's hopeless," she says with a kind of groan. "You talk as if love was so simple."

"Well, so it is," I tell her. "If two people love each other, they want to be nice, and help each other, and make things easy. I know there are lovers' quarrels, but they're soon patched up. Why, that's all part of the fun of being in love. You'll find out when the real thing comes along."

"The real thing!" she groans again. "I tell you this is the real thing, all the way through. Look, why don't you believe me and let me take my letter back?"

"I've told you why," I say. "Forty years with the Post Office and you want me to start ignoring regulations."

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"All right," she says, speaking very low and looking at me fiercely. "Go ahead and keep your regulations. But think about it sometimes in the middle of the night. How you sacrificed somebody's happiness for the whole of their life, rather than break a regulation."

"I've told you before, you're being silly," I say. "Look, I'll prove it to you. Number one, you don't really love this bloke."

"Don't love him!" she wails. "How can you possibly tell that?"

"Well, does it look like it?" I say. "You get your rag out about something, and straight away you write him such a stinking letter, full of insults and things that aren't even true, that you daren't go near him once he reads it."

"That doesn't prove I don't love him. All it proves is that I was desperate. Look, let me tell you what happened."

"All right," I say, "but make it fast. And don't kid yourself that I'll give you the letter when you've finished." I meant it, too. Regulations mean a lot after forty years.

"I usually spend Saturday evening with Jocelyn," she begins. Jocelyn. I don't like the sound of that. "And last Saturday, that's the day before yesterday, he rings up and tells me he can't do it. He's got to look after his aunt who's coming up from the country. So when my brother and sister-in-law happened to look in and see me, I said I'd go out with them for the evening. We went up to the West End and I said I'd show them a nice little restaurant I know. So we went into this place and the very first person I saw was Jocelyn."

"With his aunt from the country," I say.

"His aunt from the country," she says, nodding and looking very grim. "About twenty years old with a lot of red hair and a dress cut very low. And there was Jocelyn, leaning towards her the way he does when he's really interested in a girl."

"What a surprise for him," I say.

"No surprise," she says. "He never saw me. I knew at once I wouldn't be able to stand it. I wasn't going to have a showdown with him there and then, and as for sitting down and watching the performance and trying to eat my dinner, with my brother and his wife there on top of everything else, well."

"So you ducked out quick, and came home and wrote him a nasty letter," I say. Nine o'clock's creeping up and I'm ruddy nowhere with my collecting.

"If only I could have come straight home," she says. "But I had my brother and his wife to cope with. He's always saying I can't look after myself. I wasn't going to talk about it to him. So I looked round quickly and said sorry, this was the wrong

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place and I'd made a mistake. They said it looked all right and they'd like to try it anyway, but I said no, I was so keen to show them this special place. So there we were, out in the street, with them waiting for me to guide them and me with no idea where to go. We wandered about for ages, and my brother was in a filthy temper, and then I took them into a place and pretended that was it and it was awful. Oh, it was all so utterly, utterly awful. I couldn't even talk. I could only say yes and no when they seemed to expect me to say something. I expect they thought I was mad."

"So after *that* you wrote him a letter," I say, trying to move her along even though the collections have now gone for a dead Burton.

"After that," she says, "I go home and spend a completely sleepless night. I don't even close my eyes, because every time I close them I see Jocelyn's face as he leans towards this girl."

"All right, let him lean," I say. "If he's the type that runs after every bit of skirt he sees, he won't make you happy anyway."

"But he *does* make me happy," she says. "He's absolutely ideal for me. He makes me feel marvellous. When I'm with him I'm really glad about being a woman."

"Even if you can't trust him?" I ask.

"Casual infidelities don't matter," she says. "It's the really deep communication between man and woman that matters."

I can see this is getting out of my league altogether, so I make one more effort to brush her off. "All right," I say. "If your Jocelyn is in the deep-communication business, he won't be put off by a nasty letter. He'll see straight away that you only wrote it because you were angry or desperate or whatever it is."

"You're wrong," she says, looking at me very steadily. "There are some insults a man can't forgive. Listen, I wrote that letter on Sunday afternoon. I'd been crying nearly all morning, and every time I sat down to write I was just crying too much to see the paper. By the time I got down to it I was feeling murderous. I wrote things that I knew he'd find absolutely unforgivable. I laughed at him, I told him he hadn't been adequate for me, that I'd had other lovers all the time we'd been together. I must have been mad. I wrote so many details he'll never believe it isn't true."

"You say you love him?" I ask.

"I love him and I need him utterly," she says.

"Rubbish," I say. The whole thing is beginning to get me down. "If that's love, so is a boxing match. It's just vanity and sex, that's all it is. There's no love anywhere."

"Well, perhaps that's not a bad definition," she says, as if I've

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got all day to stand there and discuss it. " I mean, one's need for another person is partly vanity, isn't it? It's all bound up with one's own belief in oneself."

" One this and one that," I say. " You're just hair-splitting. If you love anybody, you care for them, don't you? You want them to be happy."

" That's a chocolate-boxy idea of love," she says. " I mean it's not what happens when real people get involved with each other. You may have been able to live your life by those ideas, but in that case you've been very lucky. You've never had to face reality."

Reality! From a chit of a girl like this I'm learning about reality!

" What have I been facing for sixty years," I ask her, " if it hasn't been reality? "

" Oh, I'm sure you've had lots of reality in your life," she says. " I know you've had all sorts of responsibilities and everything. It's just that your personal relationships must have been unreal. You wouldn't talk about love in that sort of Royal Doulton way if they hadn't been."

All at once I understand. She's not giving me her own opinions. She's just parroting what this Jocelyn's been teaching her. Deep communication between man and woman! I can just see his idea of it. Especially if he's got her trained so that she doesn't even count the other girls he runs after. And Royal Doulton! That's not the sort of thing she'd think up for herself.

" Listen to me, miss," I say. " Take an old man's advice and leave that letter where it is. If it puts an end to this business between you and this Jocelyn bloke, believe me, you'll live to be grateful."

At that she stares at me as if she's caught me doing something so horrible she can't trust her own eyesight.

" It's unbelievable," she says at last. " If anybody had told me that—that ordinary human beings were capable of such stupidity and cruelty, yes, *cruelty*, I wouldn't have believed them." And she begins to cry, quite silently, with the tears running down her nose.

" Which of us is cruel? " I ask her. " Me, or Jocelyn? "

" You, of course," she says, so cross at what she thinks is cheek on my part that she stops crying. " You're making me miserable *for ever* just so that you won't have to admit that your ideas about love are out of date and wrong."

" Whereas Jocelyn is sweetness and kindness itself, eh? " I put in.

" No, of course not," she says. " He's capable of hardness and

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aggressiveness and he can be cruel himself at times. That's all part of his being a real man, the sort of man who can make a girl feel good about being feminine." That's another bit of Jocelyn's patter, if I'm any judge. "A man who was *sweetness and kindness itself*," she goes on, bringing out the words as if they're choking her, "wouldn't be capable of making a woman feel fulfilled and happy. He's got to have a streak of—of—"

"Of the jungle in him?" I say, trying to help her out.

"If you like, yes," she says, nodding and looking solemn.

"Well, I don't like," I say, letting it rip for once. "I think you're a nice girl, but you're being very silly. You've let this Jocelyn stuff your head full of silly ideas, you've taken his word for it that he can chase every bit of skirt he meets, tell lies to you, string you along every inch of the way, and it all doesn't matter because he's going to make you feel happy and relaxed, he's going to make you feel good about being a woman because he's Tarzan of the flipping Apes.

"No, listen to me," I tell her, because I can see she's trying to stick her oar in, "I've stood here and listened to your story and made myself so late that the collections won't be right for the whole of today, and now I'm going to tell you what you ought to do. You're a nice girl. Cut this Jocelyn out of your life like the rotten thing he is. Go and find some young man who'll tell you that as a woman you deserve to be cherished and taken care of. Who'll love you enough to tell you the truth and play fair with you. Even if he isn't an animal out of the zoo. Make do with an ordinary human being," I say to her. "You'll find it cheaper in the long run."

Instead of answering, she just stands there crying. All right, I think to myself, let her get on with it. I've given her the right advice and that's the end.

I get into the van and press the self-starter. I'd left the engine running but it doesn't idle fast enough on these crisp mornings, and it's stalled. So anyway, I start it up and I'm just going to engage gear and move off when, for some reason, I can't do it. My foot comes off the accelerator and I look out of the window. There she is, still crying. Now's your cue to call me a sentimental old fool.

So I get out of the van again and I go back to where she's standing, crying her eyes out.

"Look, miss," I say, "it's the best thing, you know. He wouldn't have been any good to you."

"Why—?" she begins, but she's crying too much to talk. I wait a bit and she has another go and this time it comes out.

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"Why are you so sure that you know best and that I must be wrong?" she asks me.

"Well, it's simple," I say. "I've had a happy marriage for nearly forty years. So naturally I know how they work. I know what you have to do."

"But love *changes*!" she says, bringing it out as if she's struggling for words that'll convince me. "I'm sure you've been happy, but you're wrong if you think that your way of being happy would work for young people today. You belong to a different generation."

"And that makes me not human?" I ask. "Look, I've been happy with May for forty years and we've had three children. That's not done without love."

"Your kind of love," she says. "Your generation's kind. I'll bet you used to send each other Valentines with sentimental rhymes on them."

That gets my rag out. "Yes, so we damn well did," I say. "And not only that. We used to give one another keepsakes. Listen, the first time we ever went for a walk in the country, when we were courting, I picked some flowers for May and she took them home and pressed them between the leaves of a book—*and she's got them today*! Can you understand that? I wanted to love her and take care of her because she was a woman—that was the way I made her feel good, not telling her a lot of stuff about deep communication and keeping one eye out for the next little piece that came in sight. Valentines!" I say, and I must be speaking quite loud, because some people on the other side of the road stop and stare at me, "yes, we sent each other Valentines, big ones made of lace paper, shaped like hearts, some of 'em. That's something else you wouldn't understand. Try talking to Jocelyn about hearts!"

That's done it. I've got carried away and now I'm as upset as she is. I'm about ready to burst out crying myself. And me forty years with the Post Office. At this rate nobody'll get any letters at all.

"You think I don't know what love is, don't you?" the girl says. "You're quite sure that whatever I feel for Jocelyn, it's not love."

"Not what I'd call love," I tell her. "But you've got to excuse me. I don't know what love's supposed to be nowadays. I come from the wrong generation."

"The Valentine generation," she says, and all of a sudden she's smiling at me, yes, *smiling*.

"Weren't there women in your generation," she says, "who loved men and went on loving them even if they didn't treat them

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right? Didn't they sometimes love husbands who got drunk or stayed away all night?"

"I've known the type," I say.

"And what did you think about them? Did you think they were just fools who didn't know what they were doing?"

"That was different," I say. "A woman might go on loving a husband who mistreated her. But at least she didn't say she loved him *because* he mistreated her. She loved him in *spite* of it."

"Are you so sure?" she says. "Was it always as clear as that just why she loved him?"

"What are you getting at?" I ask.

"I'm trying to get you to admit," she says, "that other people might know what love is besides you."

"I'm quite sure they do," I say. "All I'm telling you is that you're wrong if you think you love this Jocelyn. You can't love a man who brings you so low."

"And you're not even going to let me try," she says, not crying now but looking steadily into my face.

"Look," I say, just to finish it. "Let's have a bargain. You tell me what you think love is, and if I agree with you I'll give you your letter back."

"Just that?" she says. "Just tell you what I think love is?"

"Yes," I say. I'm quite certain that whatever she says, it'll be something I couldn't agree with. Something from Jocelyn's angle.

"And you'll give me the letter back?" she says.

"If I agree with what you say, yes," I say.

"Well," she says, without even stopping to think, "it's—wanting to be with somebody all the time."

"All the time. You're sure?" I ask her.

"It's wanting to wake up with the same person every morning, do everything together, tell each other everything," she says.

"You know that, do you?" I say.

"Yes," she says. "I know that."

I go over to the van and get the bag out. If anybody sees this, I can be sacked, forty years or no forty years. But there's hardly anybody about, and a bargain's a bargain.

"I'll be very quick," she says, rummaging away. She shuffles the envelopes like a pack of cards and in no time at all she's found her letter and it's away, safe and sound, in her handbag.

"Bless you," she says. "I knew you'd want to help me really."

"I did want to help you," I say, "and I still think I'd have helped you more if I'd hung on to that letter."

"Don't worry about me," she says, smiling.

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"Just tell me one thing," I say as I'm opening the van door. "Your idea of love. Would you say that it was the same as Jocelyn's?"

"No," she says, as chirpy as a sparrow. "It's quite different."

"What's going to happen, then," I ask her, "if you've both got different ideas about love?"

"I'll take care of that," she says. I can see she's not worried at all. "It's what I feel for him that matters, not what he feels for me. I just want him around, that's all."

I get into the van and this time I drive away. The collections are up a big, tall gum tree. I have plenty of time stuck in traffic jams and I keep thinking of her and Jocelyn. How she doesn't care what he is or what he thinks or even what he *does*, so long as she has him. Doesn't sound like happiness to me. But all at once the thought comes to me, Well, she'll probably get what she wants. I mean to say, it didn't take her long to get me to break a Post Office regulation I'd never broken in forty years. She twisted me round her little finger, so it could be she'll twist him.

But then, of course, I'm soft-hearted compared with a chap like that. The Valentine generation. I wonder what May'd say. Not that I'll ever know. There are some things a man keeps to himself. "Was she pretty?" I can just hear her asking. "Must have been, for you to stand there talking to her and get behind with your collections and finish up with risking the sack, and no provision for our old age." No, the only way to get an idea would be to imagine May at that girl's age. She was a real woman. Not much Royal Doulton there.

I wonder.

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SIR RICHARD STEELE TO MARY SCULOCK
(*afterwards his wife*)

St. James's Coffee-House,
Sept. 1, 1707

Madam,

It is the hardest thing in the world to be in love, and attend businesse. As for me, all who speake to me find me out, and I must lock myself up, or other people will do it for me.

A gentleman asked me this morning, "What news from Lisbon?" and I answered, "She's exquisitely handsome." Another desired to know "when I had been last at Hampton Court?" I reply'd, "'Twill be on Tuesday come se'nnight."

Methinks I could write a volume to you; but all the language on earth would fail in saying how much, and with what disinterested passion, I am ever yours.

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Something Put By

Always there was a bed to sleep in
a place to hang his hat

by JOHN SALT

HARRIET WRIGHTSON kept the Starlight Room in Harkness Court, off Drury Lane. It was her own licence and she ran an orderly house in keeping with club hours. Harriet had flame-red hair and on occasion a temper to match. She stood five foot three on her stilettos, and her figure at fifty had thickened only a little. Her eyes were wide and candidly blue, her nose was pert and youthful still, and there remained about her an air of attentive hopefulness. She was hardheaded and kindhearted, with a practical turn of mind, and an instinct for survival based on a vast experience of life and of people.

Midweek afternoons were her busy times; it was then that the punters came in to watch the racing on the television set that stood on one corner of the bar. But even when the racing was off, there was usually enough trade to keep Harriet active and to save her from too much thought. Harriet herself was not a drinking woman. If she had any vice at all, it was people. Though experience had taught her that gratitude was far to seek, she could rarely resist the generous impulse, the helping hand in cash or kind. She was unfailingly loyal—and always to the wrong sort.

Only two men knew the circumstances and tricks of fate that had moulded Harriet Wrightson's philosophy: one was a weak and foolish man, her brother Willie Wrightson; and the other, the dour and driving Edward Rosewarne, Divisional Superintendent at Holborn Central just round the corner in Otway Street.

The two men were business acquaintances of some long standing, and it was on the eve of the termination of Willie's latest prison sentence that Rosewarne, accompanied by his sergeant, Jack Manbre, made a routine cautionary call on Harriet.

She greeted the tall, greying Superintendent with cheerful irreverence. "What's up with you, Ted? Come to make your miserable self happy for a change?"

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He shook his head at her. "Time you learnt some manners, Hattie."

Her manner changed abruptly. "You on duty, Ted?"

"In a manner of speaking."

She humped her shoulders. "You came to talk about Willie, I suppose."

"He's due out tomorrow."

"That's no news to me."

Rosewarne's lips tightened. Hattie recognised the warning sign and grinned. "Have a drink, then you can talk."

Rosewarne glanced at his sergeant. "It's off the wood here, Jack. I can recommend it."

"Sounds like a good idea, sir."

A weight seemed to lift from Harriet. She worked the old-fashioned beer engine and put two halves on the bar. Rosewarne's hand was in his pocket but she shook her head. "The house pays, Ted. You talk."

He smiled thinly. "That puts me under an obligation." He took the head off his beer. "You still keep a good bitter, Hattie."

"But not Willie Wrightson's conscience, so don't think it."

"Will he come here tomorrow?"

"He always has."

"What will you do?"

"Like always, there's a bed to sleep in, a place to hang his hat."

"Nothing else?"

Anger stirred in her briefly. "Nothing that's any of your business, Ted Rosewarne."

"You bought the beer, Hattie, so I'm your guest, but there are a couple of things I should remind you of. Willie was pinched five years ago today. As usual his luck was out and he tripped off the burglar alarm on the Maeve estate. He was on the run in those grounds for an hour before we picked him up. During that time he hid the Maeve necklace, thirty thousand pounds in diamonds."

"That's what *you* say."

"They never came on the market, they never left the country, they have never been heard of since. The alarm scared Willie's little helpers away, and by the time all the fuss had died down, Willie was on the charge that took him to Pentonville. And he never talked about it to anybody there either."

"I don't believe it."

"The burden of probability is against you."

"So I'm a liar now."

"I haven't said that, Hattie, but I do have to ask you this: can you do anything with Willie?"

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" Not much, never could. Why should I try now? "

" Because it's important. Willie has been inside for five long stretches. That means he's pretty well listed as incorrigible by now. You can imagine what will happen if we pinch him again? "

" Preventive detention," she said flatly.

" He could get ten years, Hattie. This time he must stay out of trouble. I have just suggested one good way. Get him to turn in the Maeve diamonds."

A spasm of pure pain twisted Harriet's face. Oddly it took away the years, and Manbre, watching, saw for a second of time a vulnerable girl behind the middle-aged mask. Rosewarne went on inexorably, " Look, Hattie, your brother has clever fingers but not the brains for this job. He worked for a bigger man. The name is Nico Carapetian."

She answered sulkily, " So everybody says and nobody has proved."

" The proof may come sooner than you think."

" That's been said as well. I'm still waiting."

" But Nico won't wait, he'll want the diamonds." Rosewarne shrugged, and turned to finish his beer.

Hattie spoke softly, a little smile played about her mouth. " Suppose I told you Willie has every reason to go straight in future. Take a look at Sally there, what d'you make of her? "

The two police officers turned their heads and followed Hattie's glance towards the end of the bar. Of the two men Manbre was the more appreciative, being closer to the age group. Sally was a clear-eyed eager girl of medium height with blonde hair built high in a beehive style. She had all the accepted aids, the make-up, the sharply supported bust, the shift dress, but her appearance was saved from the paralysing uniformity of her generation by a special animation of voice and gesture. She was leaning across the bar to talk to a darkly handsome, shockheaded youth dressed in a heavy-knit olive-green sweater and fawn cord pants.

Hattie watched the girl fondly. " Recognise anybody? "

" Good lord, it's Willie's girl. I'd forgotten he had a daughter."

Hattie smiled complacently. " Grown a bit since you fixed her up at that place in the country, hasn't she, Ted? She's been down there all those years, then she suddenly took a fancy to come back to the smoke. I've had her six months now. We get along nicely."

" She knows about her father? "

" Be your age, Ted. You can't keep a thing like that quiet for ever in even the best regulated families."

" So she's your insurance policy against Willie blotting his copybook again."

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"I'm not taking bets on it. I just think he'd be a fool, and worse than a fool, to spoil her chances now."

Rosewarne nodded thoughtfully. "Who is the boyfriend?" he asked, and was conscious at once of the barest pause in the flow of Harriet's chatter.

"Name of Johnny Farrant; she met him in the country. His father died recently and he came into a little money."

Rosewarne continued to watch the boy musingly. "Does he come in often?"

"Average, most afternoons."

"Doesn't have to work for a living then?"

"That's all I know, so it's no use pumping me."

Rosewarne chuckled and glanced at Manbre. The younger man was staring openly at Johnny Farrant. The boy looked up from his conversation with Sally and caught Manbre's eye. The two men exchanged a long, flat stare; the sergeant was the first to drop his gaze. Rosewarne noted the fact and scowled. He turned back to Hattie. "We must be off. You'll remember what I said?"

"The parts I want to, yes. No hard feelings, Ted. Willie is my brother, for what that's worth, so there's nothing I can do for you. You should know better than to ask."

"Point taken," Rosewarne said quietly, and went out with Manbre . . .

In the street the sergeant said, "How long do you give it, sir?"

"For Willie to go bent? Three months at the outside. He's a compulsive."

"He might try for the diamonds."

"He might, but it would be chancy. He'd need help."

"Carapetian knows about them, of course?"

"Too Irish he does. But he can't move without Willie, and if Willie moves we shall be on to him. What did you think of Hattie?"

"I liked her. But she's worried, and more about her niece than her brother, I'd say."

"Full marks, Jack. She watched the boy like a hawk. So did you. That wasn't too clever, by the way."

Manbre reddened. "I didn't know the form."

"The form is that we treat him as a hard case and move in when we're ready."

They walked another hundred yards in silence, Manbre dredging for the careful words he needed. Finally he said, "We do know what we're doing, sir?"

Rosewarne reacted harshly. "If you mean, do I have written

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permission, the answer is no. So far we've reached the stage where you know all the people concerned, including Wrightson and Carapetian. Your job is to keep an eye on all of them. You'll find your work cut out."

"But it's only Carapetian you really want."

"It's Carapetian I'm going to have," Rosewarne said firmly, and hurried up the shallow stone steps into Holborn Central Police Station.

The reappearance of Willie Wrightson in the world of free men was observed by a number of interested parties. Of these the most depressed was Jack Manbre, the most frustrated Nico Carapetian, the most stimulated Johnny Farrant, and the most clear-eyed his sister Hattie. Willie's future progress would have a profound effect on all their lives but only Hattie at this stage could have ventured a guess at the outcome. She had always done her best by her brother, covered for him and tried to correct him in his boyhood years when their parents were in service on the vast Maeve estate near Colchester. There had been a time during his early marriage when Sally's mother might have kept him straight, but then Clara had died, and Willie had gone wholly and cheerfully to the bad.

Willie's chief value to a man like Carapetian was the cleverness of his hands. His skill with locks, discovered in early youth and fostered over the years by a succession of masters far more astute than himself, had earned for Willie an ungrudged reputation as the finest peterman in the metropolitan area. But Willie had no wit to hide his own traces, and it was this that led him always to work for big operators and never on his own. Even such powerful protection as that of Carapetian had not always kept him out of trouble, as his prison record of the past twenty years amply testified.

But there was no violence or real vice in Willie, no memory of injuries past or anticipation of evils to come, and it was this euphoric quality in her brother that made Hattie fear his influence on Sally's boyfriend, Johnny Farrant. The acquaintance developed early when Willie, newly delivered from durance, arrived at the Starlight Room after a certain amount of celebration on the way. Sally, delighted to see her father, had introduced him at once to Johnny and watched them drink together.

Hattie broke it up at six o'clock and hustled the boy out into the evening sunlight with Sally. Then she tackled her brother. "None of your larks now, Willie Wrightson."

Willie rubbed his hands through his ginger crop and grinned at her foolishly. "It's good to see you again, Hattie."

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" That's as may be," she said tartly. " You want to leave the kids alone. I heard you getting all rob-the-rich-and-feed-the-poor with young Farrant. You're no Robin Hood, you never were. You're just a five-time loser who's spent more time inside than out, and with nothing to show for it either."

" I wouldn't say that, Hattie."

" What do you mean? "

" Just that I might be worth a bit, even now."

She sat down heavily. " Ted Rosewarne was in here yesterday."

Willie said soberly, " I'd be a fool to think he would give up. Can you get a message to Nico for me, sis? "

" I could, but I won't."

He stirred restlessly. " Don't worry. I'm not pushing it. It's a right old caper, just the same. I need to see him and he's got to see me. But the minute we get together the cops will be on to us." He shook his head then brightened. " Make us a cuppa, Hattie. I'll think of something."

Hattie stood up; her eyes were smarting and her face felt drawn and strained. " Listen, Willie. I think you ought to stop talking like that. If you get up to anything more, they'll put you inside for good."

" Maybe I'm happier there."

" Maybe you are and maybe I don't much care either way any more. But I do care about Sally. You can't hurt her, Willie. I'd hold it against you until my dying day. Promise me you'll leave things as they are." She paused, then added with sudden ferocity, " And stay away from that fat white slug Carapetian."

He gave her his easy grin. " All right, Hattie, if it makes you feel any happier. I've slowed up anyway, don't trust myself any more. Tell you what, I won't touch anything in future, how's that? Now what about that cuppa? "

She stared at him a moment longer without speaking, then went into the kitchen and began to clatter with kettle and cups. Willie listened to the gas pop and roar, then said softly to himself, " Not personally, that is . . ."

Jack Manbre's depression passed at about the same moment that Nico Carapetian's frustration was resolved and for precisely the same reason. Willie Wrightson was the active agent of their release and Johnny Farrant the catalyst. The two men had been meeting regularly outside the Starlight Room in various clubs and bars. Rosewarne, receiving daily reports of their meetings from Manbre, was certain that this ripening acquaintance remained unknown to Hattie and her niece. It was a circumstance to be weighed in the balance against certain other knowledge private to

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Rosewarne and he bided his time. Carapetian too stayed close to home, leaving his daily affairs to be dealt with by underlings. Nobody talked out of turn in club or pub, the silence grew close and oppressive, and for a time it seemed that the whole world was waiting.

The waiting began to end at seven o'clock on a rainy July evening which was the time appointed for Farrant's first contact with Carapetian. The meeting was stage-managed with some skill, but Manbre was able to report its occurrence if not its content to Rosewarne later on that same evening.

The Superintendent received the news without joy. "It's going too easily. I smell trouble, Jack."

He flicked open a file and stared at a police picture of Johnny Farrant. "Maybe it's just somebody walking over my grave. Lord knows Willie has sharp ears. He'd have picked up the whisper and acted on it."

"I'll carry on with my part, sir?"

"Yes, but be damned careful, Jack, this is the ticklish part. Carapetian must be with Farrant if they make a try for the diamonds. They've got to feel perfectly safe. I don't want any flat-footed copper gumming up the works at this stage. Who have we got on the job?"

Manbre rattled off a list of names. Rosewarne nodded, barely satisfied. "Sounds all right. But mind, Jack, if anybody puts a foot wrong I'll break him. I mean that."

"You think the diamonds are on the Maeve place, sir?"

"Damn it, they must be there, and if Nico and his playmates take the east coast road it will prove it."

The waiting period was finally over at dusk a fortnight later. Rosewarne received Manbre's urgent call just as Carapetian's car swung into Museum Street heading north. The car was unremarkable, a black Rover, three years old. Farrant sat in the back with Nico. Manbre watched a second car follow on half a mile behind and recognised certain of its occupants. He reported the tail end Charlie to Holborn Central, then had only moments to wait until Rosewarne picked him up in a green Alpine.

He coiled in beside the Superintendent. "Just the two of us, sir?"

"Plenty of help along the way, Jack. Tune in the radio and you'll hear some of it."

Manbre flicked a switch. The Highgate checkpoint reported in a nasal, metallic voice blurred by static. Carapetian's car had just passed through heading for Finchley with its accompanying vehicle under a mile behind. Both were travelling in the low

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forties. Rosewarne glanced at his watch and eased his foot off the gas. "They're going the long way and taking it slow, Jack. Check the map and keep listening out."

The lead car passed through Coggeshall just before eleven. The second car did not complete the length of that Tudor High Street but was neatly fielded by two police cars converging from sideroads. Rosewarne, passing through minutes later, grinned like a wolf and began to build up speed along the twisting white ribbon of road that led to the coast . . .

Business was slow in the Starlight Room. The unaccustomed quiet gave Hattie time to think and to worry. She glanced across at Willie reading the evening paper in a corner of the bar and looked away quickly before he could catch her eye and give her the weak smile that was meant to reassure but merely frightened her more. Resolutely she put her brother into the back of her mind and concentrated instead on the girl. There was enough to worry about there, what with that footloose boy hanging about the whole time. Hattie's attitude to Farrant had become steadily cooler and the girl's resentment was mounting. They had clashed over it that very evening when Hattie tackled the girl about Johnny finding a job.

"He has money of his own," Sally flashed back.

"What will he do when it's gone, live on love?" Hattie nagged, and could have bitten out her tongue.

"That's nothing to do with you."

"It is while you live under my roof, my girl." And then they were fairly at it with hot words flying back and forth. "You're not too old to put across my knee," Hattie bellowed, then suddenly realised that the idea was ludicrous and broke into a shout of laughter. Half furious, half weeping, the girl peered at her and began to chuckle. The storm died between them.

"I'm sorry, Hattie. I didn't mean all I said."

"Yes, you did, my dear, and so did I. So it's off both our chests. You think you're in love, I suppose?"

"You won't be angry?"

"Fat lot of good if I were," Hattie said ruefully. "But have the sense you were born with, Sally. Do you really think it would work?"

"I don't see why not," defiantly again.

Hattie sighed. "Leave it now, love, we'll talk about it tonight when the bar is closed."

So that was hanging over her head too. She glanced at the clock; the minute hand stood at ten after eleven and she called to her brother, "Lock up, Willie, be a sport, then give me a hand with the glasses."

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It was midnight by the time they had finished. Sally had supper laid when they entered the little parlour behind the bar. The girl had made a big effort to please, and Hattie's heart sank. They were in for a storm. Willie was making a good meal but Hattie picked at her food, sick at heart. Finally she pushed the plate away and reached to the mantelshelf for her cigarettes. Sally brought matches and stood facing her aunt.

"I'm going to tell Dad," she said flatly.

Willie stabbed a pickled onion from the jar and sat holding it impaled on his fork. "Tell me what?"

"Sally wants to marry young Farrant," Hattie said, then sat wondering at the resentment she felt.

Willie's reaction was equally curious. His fork went down with a clatter on the plate and his face tightened with the obstinacy Hattie remembered in him as a child. He has done something wrong, she thought in a flash. Now he's trying to cover it.

"You can't do it, girl," he said matter-of-factly.

Sally flushed. "Why not, Dad?"

"Because he's as bent as a brace-and-bit, that's why not."

She turned uncertainly to her aunt. "I don't understand."

"Your father means he's a crook, a thief." She rounded on Willie. "I don't believe it—how do you know?"

"Think I can't tell 'em? I spotted him from the first and did a little checking." He raised the fingers of his right hand and spread them wide. "Five charges, there were. Started with petty larceny, that's when he was a kid, went on to a year's probation from juvenile court, next corrective training, then two years in a Borstal; come up to date with eighteen months in the Scrubs. And that was for robbery with violence, if you're really anxious to know."

Hattie shook her head. "He didn't seem the kind. And yet I don't know, there was something . . ."

Willie went to his daughter and took her by the hands. "Look at me, Sally. I'm not much to be proud of, but I'm your father. I've been in and out of prison most of your young life and nearly all my own. I don't want you with a husband the same as me. There, that's sense, isn't it?"

She pulled away from him. "I don't care. I'm going to him now. Don't try to stop me."

Willie said sharply, "It's no use, girl. He won't be there."

"Why won't he?"

"Because he's on a job for me, out of town."

Hattie gasped. "Willie, you were never fool enough to send him to Carapetian!"

He grinned crookedly. "Needs must, Hattie. Nobody was

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watching Farrant. I gave him the down on where I put that necklace and he went off to Stambourne this evening." He glanced at his watch. "They'll be a couple of hours yet. Nico won't hurry the job."

Sally burst into tears. "I don't know what you are all talking about; please tell me."

Hattie led her unprotestingly to a chair. "You'll know soon enough, Sally dear. Meantime, all we can do is wait."

Willie said harshly, "I'm not going to wait. I'll see you two in the morning."

Hattie crossed to the door, locked it, and came back with the key in her hand. She said quietly, "You are not going anywhere, Willie. This is one time when you sit tight and think of somebody else for a change."

"Don't be ruddy melodramatic, Hattie. I'll be better off out of it."

"You, maybe, but nobody else. After tonight you can go away and never come back. I shan't miss you."

He came towards her, reaching for the key. She shook her head, near tears but still inflexible. "Think, Willie, think. There's something you could have forgotten."

"Stop rabbiting, Hattie, give me the key." He wrenched it from her and went to the door.

She called after him in a cracked voice. "Use your head, Willie, you can't go anywhere. They're watching the house; they've been watching it all day."

Carapetian's driver had pulled the car off the road and into the shadow of alder trees overhanging the glass-studded yellow brick wall that skirted the Maeve estate for a mile and more. The car rested there for ten minutes, with the waning moon catching a faint glint from its brightwork, while Carapetian waited for the second car. Finally he climbed out grumbling, a tall, fat man who bulked the larger for the heavy black overcoat he wore.

Farrant followed him, then the driver opened the boot and dragged out a rug, rubber boots, a rope ladder, and a crowbar. Farrant took them from him and threw the rug over the broken glass on the wall. Then he attached the ladder by grapnels and began to climb it. Carapetian followed heavily. The driver got back into the front seat and smoked a cigarette with his hand cupped over the glow.

Rosewarne and Manbre, concealed behind bushes inside the grounds, watched the two figures loom large against the night sky then drop to the spongy turf below the wall. Farrant detached the ladder and wrapped it round himself and strode away through

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the woods, shouldering the hooked iron bar like some terrible shepherd. Carapetian shambled on behind and the two men went plunging along, following the downward lie of the land to where the shallow Stambourne Lake gleamed under the moon.

An owl hooted once, then again. Rosewarne thought of all the other police officers spread out through the grounds and grunted only half aloud, " Gets more like cowboys and Indians every day." He touched Manbre lightly on the shoulder and moved down quietly to the shelter of trees by the lakeside. Carapetian and Farrant had halted at the water's edge. The younger man braced himself against a tree to pull on the hip-high waders, thrust the crowbar into his belt, and waded cautiously into the lake.

" What the hell is he up to? " Manbre whispered.

Rosewarne said disgustedly, " He's making for that damned Neptune fountain in the centre of the lake. Look, you can just about see it." The moon swam out from behind cloud wrack and Manbre blinked at the monstrosity which its pale light disclosed. Neptune, full-bearded and with a broken trident, drove a conch-shaped chariot drawn by rampant seahorses a-slime like himself with lichen and moss. Around him on stylised boulders a school of Nereids and dolphins disported themselves. Some were without heads and some without tails, and the stagnant lake water lapped around the debris, scumming it with weed; the whole was a ruin of something that had never been beautiful.

Manbre said doubtfully, " Is that a good hiding-place? "

" We went over it with everything short of a Geiger counter," Rosewarne answered him. " Never found a thing. I was for taking it apart but old Maeve drew the line at that. If Farrant finds any valuables on Father Neptune, he's a better man than I am."

Manbre touched his arm. " He's trying it, just the same."

Farrant had clambered on the plinth of the statue, his rubber boots scrabbling for purchase. With one arm locked around the neck of a seahorse, he leaned backwards and sent the grapnels of the rope ladder flying at Neptune's crowned head eight feet above him. He tugged on the ladder then began to climb. Carapetian moved closer to the water and peered into the misty gloom.

Neptune had become a grotesquely moving shape as Farrant hauled himself upwards and finally straddled the shoulders of the statue. He tugged the crowbar free from his belt and set it diagonally across the statue's head with the iron engaging against the tines of Neptune's crown. Three times he flung his full weight against the bar before the metal shrieked and the crown

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began slowly to turn. Once the bar slipped and the three men on the bank heard Farrant curse. Finally he could turn it with his hands alone, and he let the bar slip and go clanging down the statue to splash into the lake. Then the crown followed and Farrant had his arm shoulder-deep inside Neptune's head.

Manbre whispered urgently, "Willie had his wits about him to think of a hiding-place like that."

"He grew up on the estate," Rosewarne reminded him, "probably used it as a kid. And he had an hour to do the job before he was picked up. We found a jemmy chucked into the bracken a half mile from the lake. He must have turned the crown down too tightly for our people to spot the thread. The statue is bronze and there weren't any scratch marks. Just the same—" He broke off as a grapnel on the rope ladder slipped free and Farrant came slithering down the statue to plunge waist-deep in the lake. He thrashed back through the muddy water, abandoning the ladder.

Carapetian jumped forward to meet him, gabbling excitedly. "Did you get them? Let me see them, give them to me."

Farrant shook his head. "There's nothing there, it's a hollow casting half filled with water."

Carapetian shrieked at him, "Damn you, Farrant, you're lying. Willie Wrightson put the Maeve diamonds inside that head, you told me so yourself. They'll be there yet."

Farrant growled, "More likely in the lake bed by now. I tell you the thing is flooded."

"Then get back there, you fool, and grovel for them, dive for them. I don't care how you do it, but get me those diamonds."

Farrant said harshly, "Dive for them yourself."

Carapetian backed off and put a hand in his overcoat pocket. When he brought it out, the moonlight glinted on metal. He said in a tight voice, "Get back in the lake, Farrant, or I'll lay your bones there."

Farrant hesitated a fraction too long. As he moved in to grapple, Carapetian fired. The younger man put his hands to his face and began to crumple just as Rosewarne pinioned Carapetian from behind.

The fat man pivoted and brought Rosewarne down on top of him. Manbre plunged forward with two other police officers who had just emerged from the woods. All three stood helpless above the thrashing tangle of arms and legs. Carapetian kicked upwards with a knee and caught Rosewarne full in the mouth, flinging him to one side. Rolling to a sitting position, Carapetian tried for a shot at Manbre. The sergeant flung himself forward and felt the heat of the gun on one cheek. Then he was on top of

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Carapetian and the pistol exploded a third time. The fat bulk beneath Manbre went limp and flaccid.

The sergeant picked himself up, his hands full of lake mud and leafmould. Rosewarne was on one knee beside Carapetian. The Superintendent's face in the glare of a flashlamp was mottled and bloody.

"We made a mess of that one, Jack," he said through stiffening lips. "Friend Carapetian is for his long home. Get one of the cars as far as you can down the drive and have them radio Colchester for an ambulance. He's not going to make it, though."

Manbre gave the necessary orders, then he and Rosewarne went to look at Farrant. The boy was sitting with his back against a tree, nursing one side of his face in a handkerchief. He winced as Rosewarne tilted his head up and shone a torch on it. "You'll live, Farrant. You've got a nasty burn though, it will need some first aid before we go much farther."

"My own fault, sir. Too slow off the mark."

"Not your fault. You couldn't have known he had a gun. That's a new one for Nico."

"He meant to have those diamonds, sir. It was an obsession. I don't think I was supposed to make the return journey in any case."

"You played it pretty close to the chest, Farrant."

"Wasn't that the way, sir?" Rosewarne nodded slowly.

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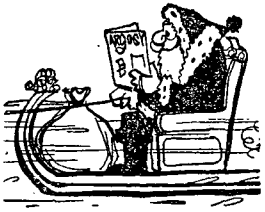

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"That was the way, Farrant—we had to hear him talk."

Manbre said a little shakily, "We were right behind you, mate."

"Thank the lord it wasn't too far behind."

Rosewarne glanced at his sergeant. "Of course, you two know each other."

"Same intake at Peel House, sir, about eight years back. It gave me a nasty turn when I read Johnny's record in the files, then saw him at the Starlight. Sorry, mate, I had you tabbed for a copper gone wrong at first."

Rosewarne put in, "The fewer who knew the better. We had to use a stranger in the Division. Farrant has been seconded to Special Branch for the last three years. We cooked the books a little to fool Willie." He turned as he spoke and watched the stretcher being carried up from the lake. A brown blanket covered Carapetian's face.

Manbre said in a subdued voice, "But we didn't get the necklace, sir."

Rosewarne didn't answer for a moment, then he said, "I'll tell you about that later. It isn't quite over yet. I shall need you too, Farrant. Feel up to it?"

"I'd like to be in at the death, sir."

Rosewarne said in a serious voice, "One is enough on my conscience for this night's work," and led the way to the cars . . .

The knock came at a little after two in the morning. Sally unlocked the bar door and started back at the sight of Farrant's ravaged face. Rosewarne gently put her to one side and elbowed

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Farrant before him into Hattie's parlour. She had not moved from her seat by the window for two hours. Willie stood by the fireplace nervously balling a handkerchief between his damp palms. At sight of Farrant his eyes flickered a warning, then narrowed.

Rosewarne dabbed at his bruised lips with a handkerchief, and began to recount a carefully edited version of the events of the night. His voice was quiet and even. Willie heard him in an angry silence, then burst out, "You've proved nothing. You kept your ears on stalks and your eyes sticking out like organ stops and you went wild-goosing out to Stambourne after young Johnny here. So Nico Carapetian went along for the ride, so maybe they had plans. But from all you say they didn't do much besides trespassing. And none of it puts me in Dutch, or Johnny either for that matter. So why don't you just poodle off back to the cop shop and dish out a few leave passes."

Rosewarne said harshly, "Nico Carapetian is dead. He was killed while trying to murder Farrant."

All in a moment Willie Wrightson went to pieces. He came forward to the tabletop and put his hands on the edge. His head was down and he shook it slowly from side to side. Still staring at the tablecloth he murmured, "You wouldn't kid me?"

"Carapetian is dead, Willie."

Willie raised his head wearily. "All right, I'll buy it." He paused a moment, then went on in a fresh burst of confidence, even of triumph, "But you never got the diamonds though, did you, Mister perishing Rosewarne?"

Rosewarne said softly, "You're wrong there, Willie. Farrant had them on him when Carapetian attacked."

Sally said in a voice near tears, "It's no use, I can't stand any more."

Hattie stood up from the table. Her face was ashen but she remained in complete command of herself and the situation. She walked across the room, keeping her eyes averted from Farrant, and put her arms round the girl. "You'll want us to stay?" she said coldly to Rosewarne.

The Superintendent nodded without speaking. He did not take his eyes off Willie.

Wrightson said in a small voice, "Well, if you've got them let's see them."

Rosewarne put a hand inside his raincoat, pulled out a plain manila envelope, and poured its contents on the table. The Maeve diamonds winked and glittered, blue and white under the lamplight.

Willie pushed at the necklace with his finger. "Five years,"

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he murmured. " Five years' hard for this little lot." He looked at his sister. " It was something put by, do you see, Hattie? Something for you and me and the girl when we got old." He went on, his voice rising a little, " I reckoned I'd earned them. The insurance had been paid out, so who was the loser, eh? Tell me that." He looked round the group until his eyes fell on Farrant. " I'm sorry, Johnny. Looks like I've lumbered you."

Farrant's face went brick red. " It's the other way about, I'm afraid."

Willie stared at him for a long moment while realisation dawned. At last he said, " It's time I jagged the bent caper in. I must want my brains tested not spotting a copper's nark." Sally went to Farrant and Willie watched her wryly. "And now it looks like I'm going to get one in the family."

Farrant put his arm round the girl and looked at Rosewarne. The Superintendent nodded. " Take her outside, she can help fix your face up."

Hattie said sadly to her brother, "You are a ruddy fool, Willie. You just had to talk, never could leave well alone."

He shook his head and said awkwardly, " You don't know this caper like I do, sis. It's a fair cop and that's the time you have to talk."

Rosewarne scooped the diamonds back into his pocket. He did it contemptuously as though the Maeve brilliants were so many glass beads on a tinsel string. At the moment, that was the way he felt about them. Manbre caught his eye and the two policemen moved towards the door. Willie picked up his hat and followed them. Rosewarne stopped him with a hand against his chest. " Where do you think you're going? "

" You'll want me down at the nick."

Rosewarne's smile was severe, but only because it hurt to move his lips. " Not this time, Willie." He tapped his pocket. " You've already done five years for these. Remember? You'll be needed at the proper time as a material witness."

The little man stared at him blankly and then at his sister. His lower lip wobbled dangerously.

Hattie gave a little chuckle. " You've stayed out of trouble this time, Willie Wrightson, the lord alone knows how." She picked up her handbag and tucked it under her arm. " I'm for my bed now and I think I've earned a lie-in tomorrow morning. Open up the bar for me, business as usual." She paused and with a bright look at Rosewarne added, " And Willie, since you're sort of in partnership for the time being, don't try to short-change the customers. You might think they don't notice, but they do."

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ALBERTO MORAVIA

The Chimpanzee

WINTER in Rome. I was going down the avenue in the Borghese Gardens leading to the museum, and all the time it was pouring with rain. But you could see each drop, as it came down, streaking the black sky with white, because the sun was shining brightly beyond the groves of trees, among luminous clouds that streamed away on every side. It was raining and the sun was shining; if I had not known it was January I should have thought it was March, so mild was the air, so tall and thick and green the grass in the plantations. It was raining in torrents and the sunshine was brilliant as gold, and the grass under the trees was drinking in both rain and sunshine alike. All at once I felt happy, and I felt a great strength in my legs as though I were a gigantic grasshopper, able to leap at one bound on to the roof of the museum, whose fine yellow facade could be seen at the far end of the avenue; and I did actually leap into the air, opening my mouth towards the sky, and a drop of rain fell right into my mouth and seemed to intoxicate me as though I had taken a gulp of liquor, and I thought, I am twenty years old . . . and I still have another forty or fifty years of this glorious life ahead of me . . . Three cheers for life!

To the right of the avenue, on the top of a little hill, I saw two or three large, well-fed horses with well-dressed young men in the saddle sheltering under the holm-oaks as they waited for the rain to stop, and I don't know why these horses looked so beautiful to me, and again I thought, I feel really happy. In the meantime, almost without realising it, I had started humming a popular song of the time; and I suddenly remembered the title of a film I had seen some time before: *Singin' in the Rain.*

Perhaps the reason why I was happy was that I was on my way to my first appointment with Gloria, the cashier at a bar in the neighbourhood of the Piazza della Regina, where I worked as mechanic in a garage. I had made my first advances to Gloria in the dark, while watching television in the bar: first I had rubbed

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my arm lightly against hers, then, becoming bolder, I had placed my hand on her hand; and in this way, when the television came to an end, I had fixed an appointment with her for Thursday, which was the day when the proprietress of the bar relieved her at the cash-desk. And now this was Thursday, and I was on my way to keep the appointment and I felt happy.

My only worry was that I had very little money. This is the sort of thing that happens when you are twenty and a mechanic in a garage. I had so little that all I was able to offer Gloria was a visit to the zoo, and afterwards, at most, a cup of coffee standing in a bar. No question of a cinema, because the cinemas in the neighbourhood of Via Veneto are expensive; and for the same reason it was still less possible to take her to a dance-hall, even the Quadraro. But I have a passion for animals and I fooled myself into thinking that Gloria shared this passion with me. Besides, I was counting on feeling: if there is true feeling, what does money matter? With these thoughts in my mind I reached the museum, which was to be our meeting-place. I found shelter from the rain under a projecting cornice, and waited.

At last Gloria arrived, coming along one of the deserted avenues in the rain, huddling under an umbrella. I don't know how it was, but I saw at once, from the way in which she was got up, that I had made a mistake: this was not the girl for me. She was all decked out, with a brand-new red coat and a bottle-green silk dress; her hair was done in a new way, so that I very nearly didn't recognise her. She usually wore it smooth and unconfined at the two sides of her face. Now, on the other hand, it was all gathered up in a lot of little curls on the top of her head, and her features, which were large and slightly coarse, seemed to stick out in an uncompromising, naked-looking fashion. I was struck by her nose which, without being ugly, was by no means beautiful, being rather shapeless and lumpy. Her mouth was like a negro's; and it was supercilious in expression and so smothered in lipstick that it glistened. As soon as we had greeted each other she said, " Ugh, this rain is the last straw. Well, where shall we go? Why not go to the cinema, just near here in Via Veneto? "

" That's a nice kind of amusement," I answered. " Sitting together in the dark in a cinema and then, when the film's over, good night and good-bye."

" Let's go and dance, then."

" I can't dance."

" You can't dance? Well, it's high time you learnt . . . Dear me, I seem to be out of luck today! Where *shall* we go, then? To sit on a seat in the gardens? "

" There's always the zoo . . ." I began.

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But immediately, curling her lip, she replied, " Like a servant-girl and a soldier on leave. Thank you very much, I think I'll go home." And she made as if to go away.

So then, almost hoping, secretly, that she really would go, " All right," I said, " good-bye."

But now she was afraid I would leave her. " Very well then," she said, " let's go there. There's nothing else for it."

So we went down towards the zoo, by a deserted avenue, in the rain. Gloria came unwillingly, as could be seen even from the scornful way she walked, dragging herself along. When we reached the gates of the zoo, there was not a soul to be seen—or rather, the only person to be seen was the man who sells coloured balloons, sheltering under a tree. I bought two tickets, and I also bought two little bags of nuts and gave one to Gloria.

" What's this for? " she asked.

" For the monkeys."

" Well, you can give them to them. I can't bear monkeys."

We went in and she started off towards the elephants' enclosure. There was an enormous one, its grey skin falling in folds as though it were too big for it, standing with its forehead pressed against the bars.

Feeling pleased already, I said, " I say, look at the elephant."

She answered rudely, " Yes, I see it; what is there special about an elephant? "

The elephant, friendly creature, was looking fixedly at us with its little intelligent eyes; so I stooped down, picked a handful of grass and handed it to Gloria, saying, " Try giving it this."

She did not want to do so, but then agreed unwillingly. The elephant put out its trunk, took the grass from Gloria's hand,

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curled back its trunk very slowly and put the grass into its mouth. Gloria was unable to restrain a cry of pleasure: "Look, it's eating, it's eating!" and for a moment I hoped that she was beginning to enjoy herself. But she immediately regretted what she had said. "Just look!" she cried. "I've dirtied my hands with mud . . . look at that!" And she wiped her hand, with a look of disgust, on my waterproof.

We went on from the elephant to the rhinoceros, a truly ugly animal with that single horn between its eyes, standing as still as a monument, all gleaming with rain.

I said to Gloria, "He's ugly but it's not his fault. Under all that armour-plating he has a nice character: he only eats grass."

But Gloria answered contemptuously, "Whatever can you find interesting about the creature? It looks as if it was all stitched together like a football." And she walked away and went into the hippopotamus house.

It was dark inside the house, and in one corner were a number of bales of hay, and behind the bars you could just see a big tank of dark, still water; the hippopotamus was not to be seen.

"It's not there, let's go," said Gloria, still contemptuous; and she ran out again.

I stayed behind and, just at that moment, there emerged from the water two things like little shining horns, the eyes of the hippopotamus, followed by part of its rump, like a piece of black bark, and then its whole head. Poor beast, it was slow because it was so big, and it had taken some time to come up out of the water; but now it was anxious to show itself off, in a good-natured kind of way, and in fact it opened its mouth wide, its huge flesh-lined mouth, with short yellow teeth planted crosswise and a tongue that looked like a cushion made of pink flesh.

Filled with joy, I called out, "Gloria, Gloria, it's come up out of the water!" But it was a wasted effort, for she was already a long way away, over near the brown bears.

The bears were lying down behind the bars, flat on the ground with their cheeks resting on their furry forefeet full of big claws, peacefully sleeping; and Gloria refused even to look at them because, she said, bears reminded her of a bearskin bedside rug belonging to an old aunt of hers. In fact she was thoroughly ill-mannered, and it was clear that she was behaving like this deliberately. She was even more disagreeable when we came to the gazelles, those highly attractive creatures, with their slim legs and beautiful black eyes and their curly horns. "Goats," she said, "have I come here to look at goats?"

I was counting on the felines, that is to say the tigers, lions, panthers, and so on. In one cage there were two truly magnificent

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tigers walking up and down ceaselessly in opposite directions, and every now and then they looked at us, their great, angry, yellow eyes glowering from their black-and-yellow-striped heads. Gloria admitted halfheartedly that they were beautiful to look at, and we were standing there admiring them when there was a general rush, on the part of such few visitors as there were, towards another cage: it was the lions' feeding-time.

I said to Gloria, " Quick, let's run and see."

And this time she allowed me to drag her away, but unluckily she stumbled and all of a sudden cried out in a plaintive tone of voice, " Oh dear me, I've broken the heel of my shoe! "

It was true; as she ran she had tripped up and the heel of one shoe was snapped off.

" These shoes—I know how much they cost me; and who's going to pay for another pair? " she began whining as she fingered the broken heel; and meanwhile I was standing beside her fuming, and from the lions' cage came a tremendous sound of roaring, and then there was nothing more to be heard: the best part of their dinner was over. When we arrived there, in fact, with Gloria limping along hanging on to my arm and I supporting her, there was nothing much left to see: the lions were crouching in the darkest corners of the cage, their big tawny heads lowered as they gnawed at some horse's rib-bones already stripped of flesh.

" They stink, anyhow," Gloria remarked; and that was all she found to say about those three lions, which were so beautiful that one could stand and look at them breathlessly for an hour on end.

I was in a bad temper too, by this time. I could have killed her, I swear. We came to the terraces where the polar bears and sea lions are kept. The polar bears were sitting about foolishly, here and there, in their thick white fur coats; one was lying with his paws in the air and rubbing his back, as if he had an itch; another was nodding his head up and down with such a stupid air that it made me laugh. Gloria's comment, however, was, " More bedside rugs."

I myself liked the sea lions too: they swam about happily, two by two, as though they were dancing, then jumped up, legless and armless as they were, on to the slabs of imitation ice, wriggling their black, gleaming bodies, and then dived again into the water. But Gloria dragged me away, saying, " I'm only interested in seals when they're made into shoes or handbags."

In fact there was no pleasing her. I decided, at this point, to let her see that I was fed up, and so, after the seals, I turned straight into an avenue leading towards the gates.

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She understood and, hanging on to my arm, asked, "Where are we going?"

"We're going out."

"And what about the monkeys—aren't we going to see the monkeys?"

"No, we'll see them another time."

"But what's the matter, are you angry with me?"

"Yes, I'm fed up with you."

So then, in her most charming way, she said, "Come on, don't be offended. D'you know, I was thinking about you yesterday?"

"What were you thinking?"

"Nothing, I was just thinking about you, that's all. Well now, come along, let's go and have a look at the monkeys."

So we went to the big cages where the monkeys live. There were a number of small monkeys, with long tails which they held in their hands while they quickly and neatly picked out fleas, gazing at us as they did so with little sad faces; and there were other larger ones, with backsides that looked like bunches of purple fruit and heads like dogs. Gloria was now anxious to prove to me that she liked monkeys; but she set about it with such an obvious effort that I should almost have preferred her to go on being as ill-mannered as before. So much so, that I said to her, "Now, shut up! Anyone can see from a mile off that you haven't the slightest interest in animals."

"That's just like you," she replied, "always discontented. I do like them, yes, I like them very much, but I can't exactly dance with joy. Now give me those nuts."

It had begun to rain again, very finely, against the light of the sun which was shining brightly behind the palm trees in the zoo.

We were now standing in front of the chimpanzee cage. One of the chimpanzees, as tall as a boy, with all its brown fur ruffled up, was in a little corner eating a banana just like a human being, that is to say, holding it in its hands and taking small bites, after pulling away the skin in a dainty and well-mannered way; another had climbed on to the swing and was going up and down, standing upright, and you wondered why it was doing so, it looked so serious. Standing beside us were two young men, one tall and thin and one small and fat, who were laughing as they commented upon the gestures and grimaces of the monkeys.

The chimpanzee on the swing came down and stood right against the bars. He stretched out his mouth, which was black outside and pink inside, as if he were going to speak, and made a queer, yelping sound; and all the time he was scratching his

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paunch at the point where the hair was thinnest. Gloria held out a nut towards him but the chimpanzee did not even notice it.

"I wonder what's the matter with him?" said Gloria. "Doesn't he like nuts?"

The chimpanzee gave a kind of whistle and walked off, bent and tired-looking, towards the back of the cage; then turned round all of a sudden, picked up a handful of some sort of filth from the floor, rushed back and hurled it in our faces.

The only one of us to be hit was Gloria: I myself was standing behind her, and the two young men jumped nimbly to one side. It all happened in a second: Gloria looked at her beautiful red coat splashed from top to bottom; the two young men burst out laughing.

Gloria cried, "Curse the zoo and curse these filthy animals," and ran away sobbing.

I started to follow her but she warned me off. "Don't come near me! Go away! Leave me alone!" And so I gradually slackened my pace and finally stopped altogether. Gloria slipped through the gate and vanished.

In the meantime a great full-coloured rainbow had appeared against the black sky, although it was still raining. I too, went on my way, leaving the zoo and going back up the avenue until I found myself again in the same place where, a couple of hours before, I had felt so happy. But now I felt crushed and depressed and the Borghese Gardens seemed the ordinary Borghese Gardens of every day and the same rain which had given me such pleasure before, so that I had wanted to drink it, now irritated me. Ah, why is it that women have the power to make us happy, yet they don't know it, and they spoil everything with their abominable characters?

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"I curse the day I married a writer!"

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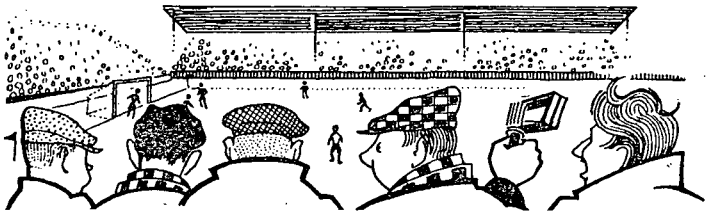

TWO THIRTY KICK-OFF

Am I so round with you as you with me,
That like a football you do spurn me thus?
You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither:
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

In Winter Footballs is a useful and charming Exercise: It is a Leather Ball about as big as ones Head, fill'd with Wind: This is kick'd about from one to t'other in the Streets, by him that can get at it, that is all the Art of it.

HENRI MISSON

To some, soldiers, Waterloo, and miniature Howitzers:
To some, football
In the sadness of an autumn afternoon
Studs and mud, the memorable dribble,
Rhododendrons at the back of the net
And the steamy dark gathering over bonfires,
The weight of water from the loosened skies.
And fingers too numb to undo laces.

ALAN ROSS, *Boyhood*

Peeling Cries

My father and I set out from our home at about a quarter to two for a two thirty kick-off. My father, complete with bowler hat and pipe in mouth, starts off at a good pace . . .

Now we are climbing up the steps into the grandstand. As we reach the top the world opens up before my eyes. The terraces are already thronged, a bobbing, untidy sea of cloth caps with new ones threading in from the gaps at the top. In the Boys' End there is already a fight going on with orange peel and adults below are turning angry heads as the missiles escape their target and fly over the fence into the men.

Then, at last, there is the first shrill cry from the Boys' End, always the first to catch a glimpse of colour emerging from the

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tunnel under the grandstand. The teams are coming out. You can tell that it is the visiting team which has come out first as these early cheers are quickly choked to death followed by only a few sporting handclaps from the grandstand—including those of my father and myself. Then a much bigger roar with shouts of "Up the Boro" as the Middlesborough team in their red shirts with white epaulettes start dribbling out from underneath the grandstand . . . As a very small boy I imagined that the players lived down there. GEORGE SCOTT, *Time and Place*

Friendly Persuasion

SEELEY: *Look. I said to Albert before the kick-off, Connor's on the right wing, I said, play your normal game. I told him six times before the kick-off.*

KEDGE: *What's the good of him playing his normal game? He's a left half, he's not a left back.*

SEELEY: *Yes, but he's a defensive left half, isn't he? That's why I told him to play his normal game. You don't want to worry about Connor, I said, he's a good ballplayer but he's not all that good.*

KEDGE: *Oh, he's good, though.*

SEELEY: *No one's denying he's good. But he's not all that good. I mean, he's not tip-top. You know what I mean?*

KEDGE: *He's fast.*

SEELEY: *He's fast, but he's not all that fast, is he?*

KEDGE: (*doubtfully*) *Well, not all that fast . . .*

HAROLD PINTER, *A Night Out*

The posters said: "Kick-off at 3.45 by Councillor E. H. Machin, Mayor-designate." And, indeed, no other celebrity could have been decently selected. On the fine afternoon of the match Denry therefore discovered himself with a new football at his toes, a silk hat on his head, and twenty-two Herculean players menacing him in attitudes expressive of an intention to murder him. Bursley had lost the toss, and hence Denry had to kick towards the Bursley goal. As the *Signal* said, he "despatched the sphere" straight into the keeping of Callear, who as centre forward was facing him, and Callear was dodging down the field with it before the Axe players had finished admiring Denry's effrontery . . . Callear went on, and good luck seemed to float over him like a cherub. Finally he shot; a wild, high shot; but there was an adverse wind which dragged the ball down, swept it round, and blew it into the net. The first goal had been scored in twenty seconds!

ARNOLD BENNETT, *The Card*

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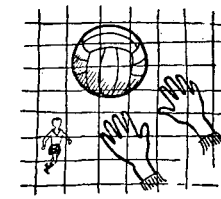
The Little Referee



Serene stands the little Referee,
Round him rage an excited multitude.
They hiss, they howl, they dance with rage.
He is not hurried, he is not even excited;
his voice is neither high nor low.
One man hits another in the stomach;
He orders them both off the field for fighting.
The crowd storm. There is every probability of a rumpus.
"If you throw things at me," he composedly says, "I will close the ground for a twelvemonth."
And like waves bursting their strength upon a craggy granite coast, fizzle, and die away into foam, so the crowd is awed into silence.

ANON

Heading Right Back

We were two goals down at half-time and changed ends to face the biting wind . . . Of a sudden I felt there was something wrong, and I was right, for our left back had decided he'd had enough and was already halfway to the small wooden shed where we had changed. I pulled back one of our inside forwards to wing half and sent the wing half to left back. Within minutes the right back had decided he'd had enough and was already running towards the wooden shed. The wind shrieked in mockery and the cold was an agony. Our opponents scored twice quickly, and to my utter amazement I suddenly saw our outside right sprint rapidly from the pitch and make a bee-line for the shed. There was now a very definite wavering in the ranks, and suddenly we all ran for it, as hard as we could, straight for the wooden shed where some relief from the cruel wind awaited us. I was roaring with laughter by the time I had reached the door. But I didn't laugh for long, for hard on our heels were our opponents, followed by their supporters, a very angry-looking crowd indeed . . .

KENNETH SHEARWOOD, *Whistle the Wind*

Silent the Stadium. The crowds have all filed out.
Only the pigeons beneath the roofs remain.
The clean programmes are trampled underfoot,
and natural the dark, appropriate the rain,
whilst, under lamp-posts, threatening newsboys shout.

DANNIE ABSE, *The Game*

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LOVE AND MUSIC

We allus used to say it 'ud take a woman to come between them

BY STAN BARSTOW

POPPING into the lounge bar of The Wheatsheaf just before lunchtime that Saturday morning, I was surprised to see Sam Skelmanthorpe sitting behind the bottom half of a pint and lighting up the room with the full glory of his scarlet tunic.

"Chalk that up to me, George," he called to the landlord as I ordered my own half-pint of bitter; and once served, I went over, glass in hand, to join him.

"Contest today?" I asked him after a brief exchange of greetings.

"Wedding," said Sam. "Just got back."

"Somebody important?"

"Important to us," he said. He took a pull at his glass. "Have you never seen a full brass band at a wedding?"

I said no, I hadn't. "A lovely sight," Sam said. "And when they play it brings tears to your eyes. Better than any organ. Lovely."

If there's a man who likes to tell the tale it's Sam Skelmanthorpe; but you have to work him round to it gently. And a little while later, when he was comfortably settled behind a fresh pint with his pipe drawing well, he began to tell me all about it.

I don't suppose you know Dave Fothergill and Tommy Oldroyd, do you? Well, they're two lads in the band. Young chaps, real pals. They've known one another right from the time their mothers took 'em to the clinic together as bairns; and before that even, because their families lived on'y three doors apart down Royd's Lane, and there wasn't much more than twenty-four hours between them being born. You might say they were thrown together right from the start, and that's the way they carried on. They went to school together—and when you're young, y'know, you can change your pals as easy as changing your shirt.

But not Dave and Tommy. They stuck like glue.

We allus used to say that it 'ud take a woman to come between

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'em, and that's how it happened. Even then we were a bit surprised.

They took an interest in the band very early on, and soon they were nattering their dads to get 'em an instrument apiece. So their dads brought 'em to see the committee. We have one or two instruments that we lend out to learners and we said we'd fix 'em up, seeing as how they were so keen. We allus try to encourage young lads, y'know. Brass banding isn't what it used to be when I was a lad. What with all this radio and television, all this entertainment laid on, there isn't the interest in learning an instrument, some road.

Anyway, they both had to have the same instrument, o' course, and they picked on the cornet as being to their liking. And old Jess Hodgkins, our conductor, offered to give 'em a few lessons just to put 'em into the way o' things.

Now they soon showed a bit o' capability and Jess used to talk about 'em at practices. " I've two right good lads yonder," he used to say, " and do ye know, I'm blessed if I can tell which is t'best between 'em! " They kept on getting better, and when they could hold their end up a bit, we took 'em into the band. By the time they were sixteen or seventeen they were sharing the solo cornet parts between 'em and we knew that we'd two o' the best young cornet players in Yorkshire. And we began to get a bit windy, I can tell you, because by the time young lads start working these days they're pining for the bright lights and pastures new, as they say. And we were a bit scared that one of the big bands like Fairey or t'Dyke might be hearing of 'em and snapping 'em up. Not that we'd have stood in their way, mind you; but they were two such grand players that they all but made our band, and we couldn't bear the thought o' losing them.

But as it turned out they seemed well settled. When they left school they took to farming with old Withers, as keeps that place on Low Road, and this seemed to suit 'em nicely. They played engagements round and about with any band that was short o' men, and they even had offers to go and play with jazz bands in Cressley and such places. But they weren't having any of this. No jungle music for them, they said, and they were stopping where they could play some *real* music.

Well, all this was fine for us. But we all knew that one thing was sure to take 'em away, and split 'em up, and this was their National Service. But you know, they went up together, they served together, and they came back together. And when we asked 'em how they'd managed it, they just grinned in that quiet way they both have and said it'd take more than the Army to split *them* up.

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Well, I reckon you've guessed, it did. It took a lass, and a town lass at that.

Seeing as they wouldn't be away that long, Withers had decided not to hire another man. He set a landgirl on. And no sooner had Dave and Tommy got back to work, than the trouble started. Give credit where it's due—it was Short Fred, our librarian, who first spotted what was going on; and he used to come up to the band-room and tell us how both Dave and Tommy were making sheep's eyes at this lass; and how she was making up first to one then the other.

What I should tell you here is that neither of 'em to our knowledge had ever showed any interest in lasses afore; but this Cynthia was a sly bit. She made out she was a music lover, and that she'd heard 'em play. Find a man's weak spot, they say, don't they? Well, she'd found both Dave's and Tommy's there. She had 'em danglin' straight away. And not satisfied with one, she had to play one off against the other by telling each of 'em, when the other one wasn't there, that he was the finest player she'd ever heard.

One of the nicest things about Dave and Tommy up to this time was that there'd never been a breath of jealousy between 'em; but after a bit of Cynthia's tactics they started giving one another funny looks. In the end they gave up coming to practices, and word got about that they weren't speaking.

Well, this was a bit of a capper. I mean, it was the last thing anybody expected. And here were we with a full programme of summer concerts and our two best men behaving like bairns. We couldn't reckon it up at all. We studied it all roads, and we spent a lot o' time talking about it when we should have been practising. We sent Jack Thomas, our secretary, down to see 'em, and he came away with a flea in his ear. So there was nothing else we could do. I mean, folk have been getting into this kind of trouble ever since the Garden of Eden and the best thing to do is leave 'em to come round on their own. But that didn't alter the fact that we shouldn't sound so good without 'em, and we brooded about it.

Then one Thursday night both Dave and Tommy rolled into the band-room and sat down in their places. They didn't say much to nobody, and not a word to one another. And when the practice was over they packed their instruments and walked off without stopping for a natter and a dust-slaker in The Fox and Ferret like they'd allus done before. We couldn't reckon this up, neither. It was obvious they hadn't made up. It left us with summat else to speculate about.

The same thing happened Sunday morning. In they walked,

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said nowt to nobody, did their playing, and walked out again. But after, Fred gave us a bit of news. Cynthia was leaving the farm. We were sure this had some bearing on it, and before long, what with odd bits of talk and gossip, we'd pieced it all together and the idea was this. They were both fed up with one another interfering with their courting, and still this Cynthia wouldn't plump for either of 'em. Well, it was being a music lover like that had first attracted her to 'em, so she said, and they both knew they'd be doing a bit o' showing off at our first concert, so they'd fixed up for her to come and hear them and make her mind up between them after.

In the week or two left before the concert they practised like mad, and folks used to hear music coming from down Royd's Lane at all hours of day and night. It got so bad towards the end that the bobby had to have a walk down and tell 'em that all this midnight triple-tonguing constituted a breach of the peace, and they'd better tone it down—or else!

I remember that the Sunday after Whit was a lovely day. We hadn't another like it all that summer. We hired a bus as usual to take us and the tackle down to the park, and when we got there the place was packed to the treetops with folk in their Sunday best. A record gate we had that day, as a matter of fact.

The afternoon concert went off grand, and we had a very nice boiled ham tea, I remember, before setting about the evening programme. This was when Dave and Tommy were going to do their stuff. You know, I've been in brass banding for nigh on forty year and I've heard some stock o' cornet players in me time; but I've never enjoyed owt so much as hearing them two lads play that night. They played like angels: they were like somebody possessed. One of the pieces we did was *Alpine Echoes*, and we had Dave on the platform and Tommy up a tree in the park, echoing him. Wonderful. And the clapping! I didn't know park audiences had it in 'em. But you know, I shouldn't have liked to pick between the two lads.

Well, when we'd played *The Queen* the lads hopped it, and the rest of us went across the road to The Weavers for a sneck-lifter before going home. We'd been in there about three-quarters of an hour, I should think. And when we got back to the bus, who should be there but Dave and Tommy; Tommy sitting inside on his own and Dave prowling about reckoning to look how the bus was put together. We all climbed in, reckoning that we thought nowt of it, though we could see from their faces that all wasn't well. And in the end we couldn't hold it any longer and we gave Short Fred the nudge, seeing as how he knew 'em best, and he asked 'em what was wrong.

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Well, Dave looks down at his feet, then sneaks a glance at Tommy, who's begun to colour up a bit. Then he says, " She's gone." Just like that. " She's gone."

" Gone? " we says. " How d'you mean, gone? "

" I mean what I say," Dave says, a bit short like. " She's gone with another chap."

And then Tommy finds his voice, and he was all choked up he was so mad. " Aye," he says, " I know him an' all. He's a blitherin' saxophone player from Bradford."

Well, we just gaped at 'em for a minute, and then somebody started to laugh, and in a second we were all at it, fit to bust. And all of us rolling about helpless seemed to bring the lads round, because in a minute Dave gives a sheepish grin and looks at Tommy, and Tommy grins back. And before we're home they're sitting together and chatting away as though they'd never heard of a lass called Cynthia.

" And that's how it's been ever since," Sam said. " They just got married this morning, both of 'em, double wedding."

" To two girls, of course," I said.

" Oh aye," said Sam. " But twins. Lasses from down in Cressley. Alike as two peas, they are. Nobody but Dave and Tommy seems to be able to tell 'em apart."

He lifted his glass and drank. I looked up in time to catch a broad wink directed at me over the rim.

" Course, now we're all wonderin' what's going to happen next."

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CASE IN CODE

THE CASE OF THE HOUSEBREAKER

When Paddy Riley was arrested in the act of stealing a van he had in his pocket a message, probably from his accomplice, McDonald:

CRE HUE GAD AEU CNAN
ONR OS RN VNE OTIS
WDIG PEET HUE EPY BIG
EDN RSNS OS MT RN
VN NN OLC J C
A I E COK OK

" Look," said Detective Inspector Bassett, " here's an easy one." He passed the code to Sergeant Nash. " McDonald's planning to break in—he's told us all about it."

D. PENN-BULL

Solution next month

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Sultan's Splash

NORMAN is free, now, Henry," the secretary said, and gave him a five-amp smile. Through Norman's open door—Dobbs-Journeyman Publicity discouraged closed office doors and were known to ease out executives who were over-keen on privacy—the Copy Chief had for the last five minutes been visible reading *The New Yorker*, but Henry pretended not to have noticed this.

As he entered, Norman began to scuffle in an important way among the papers on his desk. Henry patiently studied the familiar props: the fever-pink carpet, the palm tree growing upside-down from the ceiling with the Dobbs-Journeyman slogan *We can lick Gravity too*, wreathed about its trunk. It needed pruning.

Norman looked up with a dazzling smile. "Well, Henry! What can we do for you, so early in the morning?"

"I'd like the day off, if you don't mind. My aunt's dying."

The smile grew infinitesimally less dazzling.

"Rather a banal excuse, dear boy?"

Someone had once said in Norman's hearing that he would have made a good archdeacon, and since then he had adopted a subtly paternal attitude towards his staff, giving them inscrutable beneficent smiles and encouraging them to confide in him by a manner that combined teasing camaraderie with honest, manly sympathy. On some people it worked very well. He slumped

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By JOAN AIKEN

back in his swivel-chair now and regarded Henry quizzically; he was a squarely-built man with a square smiling face, a mass of curly black hair, and an unusually large mouth. His copywriters said that you could see Norman smiling even when you stood behind his back. He wore a white suit, and a rosebud in his buttonhole.

"You know, Henry boy, if you take many more days off I shall begin to wonder if you don't love us? And since you have dropped in, I think I should mention that your work lately has been just a scrap—shall we say—uninspired? Maybe we don't stimulate you enough here, Henry? I wonder if another job, just for a breath of fresh air, might be beneficial? Just for a couple of years, say? Then, of course, we'd welcome you back with open arms."

Of course, Henry thought; if I came with a lot of other people's ideas.

"I'm sure Blather and Pother would jump at the chance of securing you," Norman ended, beaming, his eyes Cheshire-cat slits of fun and friendship. With a strong effort Henry refrained from putting his hand into the pocket where Blather and Pother's letter regretted they could not avail themselves of his talent at present.

"But to return to your story, dear boy. Ah, if only some of this imagination could be canalised!"

"I'm afraid it's the truth," Henry said stolidly, and held out a telegram.

It read: I SHALL DIE TONIGHT AT 10.8 STOP CAN YOU ARRANGE TO BE THERE STOP LURLINE HAMMERSTALL

Norman raised his brows over this. "Suicide?" he inquired.

"No, she has always said she'd have a presentiment when the time came. She's ninety-five."

"Lurline Hammerstall," mused Norman. "Why does that name ring a bell?"

"She was a romantic novelist in the nineties. *A Broken Blossom, Ten Days in the Desert, Passion's Oasis.*"

"Of course, of course. And didn't she run off to Constantinople with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?"

"Baghdad, with the Foreign Secretary," Henry corrected. "Lord Barbilliard. It was a famous scandal."

"So it was. And people sang a song about it, didn't they?

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" I'd rather ride on a camel with Barbie
Than frivol at Ascot or win on the Derby;
I'd rather spoon by the Sphinx with Lurline
Than speak to the Commons or chat with the Queen.

" What ever became of Barbilliard? "

" He died in the desert in some obscure way; I think it was said he caught a tropical disease. Lurline subsequently married the Sheikh Ibn al Fuaz el Mezzat al Kebir. When he died, twenty years later, she came back to England with her three-legged crocodile and settled down in Dorset. I'm her great-nephew and only living relative."

" What glamour, my dear! Of course I can see that you must certainly be at her deathbed. Perhaps she'll leave you a fortune —her books sold like hot cakes in the nineties, didn't they? "

" She spent all the money on confort moderne for the Sheikh; she has nothing but an annuity."

" Too bad," Norman said gaily. " Well, think over our chat on your trip, won't you? By the way, I'm moving you off your present accounts—just for a little change, just for a breath of fresh air."

" What are you giving me? " Henry asked with a horrible sinking.

" Watkyns' Spread-well Butter."

" Nothing else? "

" Just to concentrate your abilities, dear child. So be thinking up some really scintillating, really creative ideas for tomorrow, will you, and we'll have a little meeting as soon as you come in."

Spread-well Butter! If Norman had thrown a lump of the stuff at him the news could not have come with a more dismal squelch. Spread-well Butter, made allegedly from residues of several other butters and cooking-fats, had been a non-seller for twenty years, and was among the dregs at the bottom of the Dobbs-Journeyman barrel. Sitting in the train, Henry let his mind teeter distractedly between apprehensions of his aunt's deathbed, and alarm at the poverty-stricken quality of his ideas about butter. The only thing in Spread-well's favour was it cost little more than other brands: it had an unpleasant oily taste and tended to disintegrate to a puddle if the thermometer rose more than a few degrees.

Henry saw dismissal staring him in the face; he would not be the first copywriter sped out of Dobbs-Journeyman on a Spread-well slide . . .

An aged taxi met him at Loose Chippings station; the driver gave the impression of having only just removed a straw from his mouth.

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"So the old lady's failing at last?" he said, as they ground along the high-banked lanes. "Ah, she'll be a sad loss, she will. They don't come like that no more. She'll be missed despert bad in these parts, that's suttin."

"Oh?" Henry said. "I'd no idea she was a well-known character."

"She be mortial clever wi' her unguments and linimations; ah, her linctuary for Megrim of the Bowel have saved many a soul from old Dr. Wassop's clutches. Folk comes to her from far and near for poltuses and elixatives."

If this was so, it was plain that Miss Hammerstall made no great profit from her activities, for her cottage was dilapidated to a degree, and could hardly be seen for the unpruned creepers smothering its exterior. The front garden was overgrown and neglected, but rows of neat plants were visible at the rear, casting long shadows in the light of the setting sun. Miss Hammerstall herself stood by the gate, bidding affectionate good-bye to a pretty dark-haired girl who looked rather tearful and carried a basket.

"Ah, Henry! How good of you to come. Tansy, this is my nephew, Henry Hammerstall; my god-daughter, Tansy Argew. Adieu, then, Tansy, precious girl; I know you will remember all I've told you. Henry, come in; you must be dying for food."

Aunt Lurline did not look as if she were within four hours of presumptive death; nor did she look ninety-five; she might have been a healthy, wind-browned sixty. Traces of great beauty remained in her delicate, aquiline features and her eyes were remarkable: a dark Mediterranean blue, unfaded by age.

Over kouskous, kebab, and Turkish coffee, she explained why she had asked Henry to come.

"You hear that knocking, dear boy?"

Not being deaf, he could hardly fail to. He had been thinking it an odd time to initiate what sounded like extensive repairs to the roof.

"No, it isn't workmen, it's rappings. Spirits, that is to say. I sent you the telegram as soon as it started; Barbie always promised he'd give me twenty-four hours' warning. Dear me, I am looking forward to seeing Barbie again; he was always so entertaining, dear fellow! That's why I asked you down, Henry. I fear I am sadly out of touch with public affairs now, and I know Barbie will expect to hear all the latest political gossip, so I want you to spend the next few hours giving me a good briefing. Oh, before you start, I should mention that I have made you my literary executor."

Henry expressed his gratification.

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"There's no money in it," Lurline said frankly. "All my books have long been out of print—unless you can do something with my unpublished manuscript—*Jottings from a Desert Diary*." She gave him a large battered black folder crammed with loose and rather grimy pages. "Tansy, of course, inherits the cottage, which would be no use to you; she will keep on my practice and look after the herbs and the crocodile pool."

"Pool?"

"In memory of poor Fuaz, you remember him? He died three years ago, faithful fellow; crocodiles do not really thrive in this climate. There's his anklet hanging on the wall."

Henry remembered that the crocodile had always worn a gold band on his right foreleg.

"But now, Henry, to work! From dear Barbie's rappings, I infer he is just as impatient as I for our reunion, so pray, without delay, tell me all the scandals; you are such a young man of affairs! Which party is in power at present, and who is premier?"

The next three hours were almost as exacting for Henry as one of Norman's little meetings, but he came through with fair credit; luckily he took a keen interest in current affairs—he would have liked to go in for politics had he not been under the

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sad necessity of earning a living—and was friendly with several Fleet Street journalists, so that he was able to give Lurline the inside stories she demanded.

At a few minutes past ten she said, "Thank you, my dear boy; you have been a great help. Now: I had better just powder my nose—so—and a touch of perfume—Fuaz was always so fond of this Attar of Roses." Henry wondered if she was referring to the crocodile or to her second husband the Sheikh Ibn al Fuaz.

"By the way," she said, "if there is anything you don't understand among the jottings, Tansy will help you. But remember—discretion always! There are some powerful . . ."

Her voice died away. Henry looked at his watch. It was exactly 10.08 p.m. The rappings had ceased and the cottage was extremely quiet. He gently and respectfully covered his aunt's face with her lace burnous, went up to bed, and slept soundly.

Next day, having left the funeral arrangements in the capable hands of Tansy and Dr. Wassop, he caught a train back to London and spent the journey absorbed in Lurline's *Desert Jottings*.

"*June 7th*, 1889. By caravan across Rub' al Khali; at Little Hufhuf Oasis we encountered Sheikh Ibn al Fuaz el Mezzat al Kebir with his retinue. The Sheikh v. gracious. Invited us both to sherbet.

"*June 9th*. Sheikh I. al F. el M. al K. suggested we continue our journey together. I was delighted at prospect, but Barbie less so; he has not altogether taken to Fuaz; says some of his ideas not cricket!! I, however, find the Sheikh a *complete gentleman*. Unfortunately desert life does not really suit Barbie; the insects annoy him terribly & he misses his club.

"*June 18th*. Sheikh Fuaz lent me Arab mare, took me on delightful gallop after antelope. Scenery *v. romantic*!!! A most exhilarating excursion. Barbie, I am sorry to say, remained in tent all day, *sulking*. In evening played chess with S.F.

"*July 4th*. Fuaz has given me a collar of pink pearls in requital for rubbing his housemaid's knee. Such a pretty colour! B. v. disagreeable; says in any case they will *fade*. Chess again in evening; French defence."

Here, unfortunately, there came a gap in the journal; all these entries had been written on one sheet, and, search as he would, Henry could not find the continuation. The next sheet began in the middle.

". . . still miss poor B. sadly. Who would have expected such a result from the immersion?! But perhaps it was for the best. Desert life did *not* suit him & he had repeatedly begged me to

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return with him to Weybridge. He is happier as it is. Sh. Fuaz *most* gentlemanly & considerate; begs me to look on the Royal Tent as my own, & has presented me with a *delicious* opal-studded belt. Also provided a portable water tank, thoughtful creature! Chess till 2 a.m."

What could be the use of the portable water tank? Henry wondered. The journal did not declare. He browsed on, finding a thread of narrative here and a thread there, casually mixed among oriental-sounding recipes, purple patches of verse, some unskilled but evocative sketches of camels, robed figures, and palm trees, remedies for illnesses, historical and topographical notes. In fact, a sort of Arabian Mrs. Beeton, he mused, reading:

" *The Camel.* A useful but ill-condition'd animal which, on account of its curious Stomach, can travel for ??? miles without water at ??? miles per hour. To cure camel-gall: immerse the afflicted part in Hot Tar for half an hour. Considerable force and resolution are needed."

From this time on, it was plain, progress towards matrimony between Lurline and the Sheikh was swift and unimpeded.

" *August 9th.* Today I and my dear, dear Fuaz became Man & Wife. Oh, how happy it makes me to write these words!!! He has given me a wonderful set of chessmen—rubies and black diamonds—& ordered new carpets for Tent.

" *September 20.* Have been attempting to interest Fuaz in *English cookery*; he is laughably suspicious of such things as our good oatmeal porridge, etc. Tried to convince him that a diet of food cooked largely in rancid oil not *altogether beneficial.*"

A number of recipes followed.

Henry was now mystified by several references to Barbie. Could Barbilliard, after all, be still alive, playing some melancholy gooseberry role? But it soon became clear that the Barbie referred to was, in fact, a pet crocodile belonging to Lurline; the first, presumably, of the dynasty ending with three-legged Fuaz.

" *September 30th.* Fuaz has given me a silver chain for dear Barbie. He looks so sweet in it, the links flashing as we toss him fish!

" *October 2nd.* Eureka! I have at last found a way to make porridge palatable to Fuaz. Who would have thought it possible to make porridge crisp and crunchy! But it can be done!! And so simply!!! Old Fatima, the great-aunt by marriage, is indeed a treasure-house of lore. I believe this process could also be used on oil & might prevent it turning rancid. Must experiment."

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Several years, it seemed, then elapsed happily and uneventfully, spent in roaming about the desert from one set of in-laws to another. Only one mishap marred the idyll.

" *August 9th.* Horrible catastrophe!! Fuaz had his left hand bitten off by B., whom he was teasing with a piece of fish. I felt oblig'd to point out that if he had not acquired this unkind habit the accident wd not have occur'd. Have dressed the Limb with Hot Tar & Fuaz is well enough but much agitated & has ordered B. to be destroyed. I, too, greatly afflicted, indeed a seething ferment of vain regrets. But it is true B. hd become rather Large and Dangerous. I shall lose no opportunity of procuring a successor.

" Thinking the matter over, in the light of what F. told me before she died, the accident seems little more than *Poetic Justice.*

" To clarify camel fat . . ."

Henry looked up and found his train entering the terminus. Hastily he bundled Lurline's manuscript into his briefcase and dived for a taxi, his mind awhirl with crocodiles, camels, and minarets. What had Fatima told Lurline before she died? Why was it poetic justice to have your left hand bitten off by a crocodile?

The taxi pulled up outside Dobbs-Journeyman's offices in High Holborn. Henry paid and took the lift up to his office. It was not until he saw the *Urgent* note, signed Norman Garple, that he remembered his last interview. Good heavens, Spread-well Butter! He had not given it a thought for the last twelve hours.

" Here's our wandering boy," Norman said with his indulgent smile. " And I've no doubt he's teeming with creative ideas after his little jaunt. I'll just introduce you round the Spread-well group, Henry, and then we're all agog to know what you've thought up for us."

Henry heard no word of the introductions. His mind was, as Lurline would have said, a seething ferment of vain regrets. But there was no use crying over spilt butter. The best thing would be to wait till Norman had finished speaking and then tender a dignified resignation; perhaps he could let it be inferred that Lurline had, after all, left him an unexpected legacy.

" I leave Spread-well Butter in Henry's capable hands," Norman said, and sat on a corner of a table looking receptive and anticipatory.

Henry stood up to speak.

" We all know what's the matter with Spread-well Butter," he was surprised to find himself saying. " The price is O.K., but

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it has a nasty taste and an oily consistency. I suggest that we ignore the taste for the time, but get the client to produce the butter in a crystallised form, and launch an all-out campaign on the theme:

Crisp, Crunchy Spread-well Butter Puts the Crunch in Lunch."

He paused and looked to see what effect his words were having. The group were gazing at him bug-eyed, openmouthed, uncertain whether to laugh.

"Dear boy," Norman said silkily. "Such a sense of *fun.*"

"I'm serious," Henry said. "I have notes of a process here that is guaranteed to crystallise any food with a sloppy, oily consistency. Like butter. Or porridge. Would you like to see it demonstrated?"

He pulled Lurline's recipe out of his briefcase, praying that it would work as well in the cold English climate as under the hot skies of Arabia.

"You really mean this?" Norman said. "We don't have to ring for a psychiatrist?"

"Sure I mean it. Have we any butter?"

"Rilla," said Norman to his secretary, "bring butter. And porridge. What else will you need?" he asked Henry.

"Tartar—sodium silicate—starch—ice—one or two other things. I'll go over and get them from the Home Economics Department."

"I'll ring them, dear child—just tell me what you want." Norman made rapid notes.

An amazing feeling of power and exhilaration took command of Henry. Even Norman now seemed impressed by his confidence. When a girl from the kitchens brought the required ingredients and a portable hotplate, he handled them with the certainty of a conjurer.

"Which shall we begin with—butter? I clarify it in a saucepan, add this—this—and this, stir briskly, chill rapidly and—there you have it. Simple, isn't it? Crisp, crunchy butter."

He shook the saucepan. Sure enough, it was filled with opaque yellow crystals the size of maize kernels.

"Equally delicious on toast, bread, or crackers," he said, shovelling the crystals on to a sheet of blotting-paper. "Doesn't affect the flavour at all. It's exactly the same process for porridge, only of course you get grey crystals. Crisp, crunchy porridge . . ."

"Boy," whispered Tom Tocksin, the TV director, "you've revolutionised the food industry. Just wait till the client hears of this."

"I think I'd better get on the line to them," Norman said,

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looking preoccupied. "They'll be delighted, I'm sure. It's great stuff, Henry, great! I suggest we all adjourn till after lunch, half past two, everybody? Right."

Henry floated back to his room on unaccustomed waves of triumph. Most of the Spread-well group came with him and it was natural that they should all float together down to The Fighting Cocks to celebrate Henry's stroke of genius. But after half an hour Tom Tocksin suddenly slammed his glass on the counter and exclaimed, "Fools that we are! You ought to be down at the Patent Office. Get a taxi, quick!."

"Patent Office?"

"Staking your claim, oaf! Hurry!"

Too late! By the time Henry had found his way to the right department, Patent OOXZA/79658532Q, *Method of Crystallising Liquescent Foodstuffs*, was already pending, registered under the name of Norman Garple.

Three weeks later Norman left Dobbs-Journeyman to become a director of Spread-well Krunchy Foods Ltd.; in six months he was a millionaire.

Henry was pardonably annoyed at this turn of events. True, he had been given a small increase in salary but, by and large, he felt that things had turned out inequitably. The thought of Lurline irritated him so much that he thrust her manuscript into a bottom drawer until a publisher, learning that the world-shaking invention of crunchy butter stemmed from one of her desert recipes, rang up and asked to see *Jottings from a Desert Diary*.

"I'd better put the pages in order and get it typed out first," Henry said. "It's in a frightful mess." With belated caution he had remembered that there might be other epoch-making household hints in the journal.

He began laboriously typing it out, but was soon in difficulties with Lurline's handwriting, particularly over measurements and ingredients in the recipes. At this point he recalled Tansy, Lurline's god-daughter. Perhaps she could help?

He sent her a card, inviting himself for a weekend to the pub at Loose Chippings . . .

Six weeks later Henry rang up Norman Garple and asked if they could meet. Norman was his usual urbane self, but difficult to pin down.

"I'm so busy, dear boy—there's hardly time to breathe. But perhaps I could fit you in just for a few minutes—at my office, say round about six on Thursday evening? That suit?"

"Excellent," Henry agreed cordially.

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The Spread-well offices were emptying fast when Henry arrived for his appointment. A secretary let him in, put on her hat, and hurried down the stairs. Norman, looking high-level and harassed, nodded to him in a bitten-off fashion.

"The commercial hurly-burly, Henry—it's hideous, really hideous. I can't tell you how I long for the dear old creative days at Dobbs-J. Well, what can I do for you, boy? Anything to help a friend from auld lang syne."

"I've come to you for advice, really," Henry said with a diffident air. "Of course, it's cheek, but you have such a lot of know-how when it comes to marketing. I thought perhaps you'd have some suggestions about a new product."

"Which new product is that?" Norman asked alertly.

"It's something else from old Lurline's journal. Really that turns out to be very good value. This new thing is one of her Arabian notions, picked up from an old great-aunt of Ibn al Fuaz. You know the Arabs are great on fancy baths—when they can get hold of some water, that is; well, this is a sort of bath-foam powder, invented long before the days of detergents. Fuaz used to have it made up specially; I thought maybe it could be sold as a bath essence for men, called something Arabian Night-ish like Sultan's Splash."

"Sounds a possibility," said Norman. "What's it like?"

"Not bad at all," Henry told him with carefully moderated enthusiasm. "You put a spoonful in your bath and it really does make you feel a different person; after five minutes' soaking you're relaxed and vigorous and wide awake. Like to try it?"

"Love to, dear boy. You've brought some with you? Good show. I'm going straight on to a cocktail party, matter of fact, so I'll just pop a spoonful in the directors' tub . . ."

The police were not inclined to connect the disappearance of Mr. Norman Garple with the coincidental discovery of a medium-sized crocodile in the directors' bath at the Spread-well offices. They did, however, arrest Henry, as the last person known to have seen Garple alive, and he had a difficult time convincing a sceptical Chief Superintendent that he had performed an Arabian-Nights trick on his ex-business associate.

"Look, I can only prove that my story is true by doing it again, can't I?" he said reasonably. "And who's going to volunteer to be the guinea-pig? No, I can't undo the effects, and so far as Garple's concerned I don't want to. There's no law against turning a man into a crocodile."

In the end, as the police remained tiresomely intransigent, Henry's lawyers advertised for someone genuinely fed up with

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life. The thousands of replies were gradually sifted down to one candidate: Albert Weeks, a sad, defeated little ex-swimming instructor whose wife would not let him go in the water in case he had heart-failure. Life had been robbed of meaning for him. When he understood the case he gladly immersed himself in a bathful of Sultan's Splash and became an undoubted crocodile. This convinced the police, Henry was released, and the two crocodiles were given to the zoo—where they received kind treatment and lived long, socially-useful lives.

"I suppose Fuaz the crocodile really was Ibn al Fuaz," Henry observed to Tansy some days later, as they strolled hand-in-hand through the garden at Loose Chippings. "Lurline must have been annoyed when she discovered the trick he'd played on Barbie, and turned the tables."

"I think Barbilliard was always her real love," Tansy said. "She began to suspect that Fuaz had used a love potion. Oh, excuse me; talking of love potions, I promised to take one along to Dr. Wassop's receptionist. I shan't be gone long."

Henry and Tansy were married next year. This would have delighted Lurline, who had, indeed, planned it. They lived comfortably; Lurline's practice and film rights from the *Desert Jottings* provided a steady income; moreover, though Sultan's Splash never went into regular commercial production, Henry achieved his ambition to enter politics by making small quantities of it discreetly available to his own party for the removal of undesirable parliamentary opponents. The number of crocodiles in the zoo increased materially in the next few years.

Henry's devotion to his wife was undoubted, whether or not it had been boosted by any recourse to love potions on Tansy's part, but, until the end of his life, he had a curious phobia about baths, preferring to take them when his wife was out of the house, and always carefully rinsing the bath first with a strong solution of carbolic before venturing to set foot in it.

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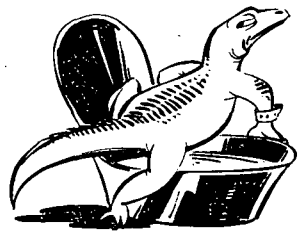

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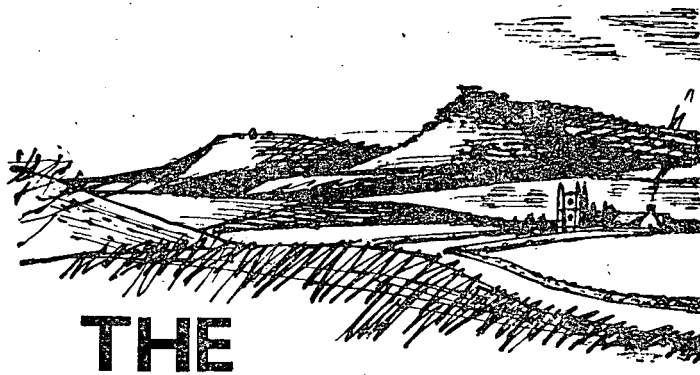

THE STONE OF WITNESS

True Devonians are very county-conscious: it is not surprising, for Dunmonia was once a kingdom. Among them the informed devotees of Dartmoor constitute a specialised élite. Not long ago I found myself sitting next to one of these on a Comet flight from London to Athens, and in the seclusion of the upper atmosphere he told me the following story.

A PARISH map of Dartmoor is rather like a wheel, with the great expanse of Rydfold for a hub from which all the marginal parishes radiate spokewise. In the spring of 1937 my brother-in-law, John Hewitt, was offered and accepted the living of one of these. I could not get away from my London office for his induction in June, but managed a belated holiday in October, and went down to see the family in its new home.

It was by no means my first visit to Dartmoor. My mother's people were Devonians, and as children we invariably went down to the West for the summer holidays. Sometimes it was to the sea, but as we grew up Dartmoor tended to take its place. My father was a keen antiquarian, and we were introduced at an early age to the moor's wealth of prehistoric remains, for the Bronze Age was his special interest. By implication we developed a walking potential which would stagger this age of the family car.

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By

ELIZABETH LEMARCHAND

Argosy's new discovery

While still a schoolboy I was familiar with all the outstanding antiquities: the stone rows and circles, and the famous menhirs or longstones such as Beardown Man and the massive giant at Drizzlecombe.

My sister Frances met me at Exeter with the car, and we were soon nosing our way down the steep hill to the river, over the bridge, and out into the country. Neither of us were good correspondents, and there was a fair amount of leeway to make up.

The move seemed to have been a success. "The Rectory is quite the best we have ever had," she said. "Plenty of room to spread, but a manageable size, and the garden is controllable, too, with a man one day a week. The children love everything and are fighting fit."

"What about John's side of things?"

"Pretty good. The Church isn't one of the showplaces of course, but attractive and relatively unrestored, thank goodness. There's a good church tradition in the village, and funds seem reasonably adequate. Visiting takes time, naturally: the outlying farms are pretty remote. There are really very few problems."

I glanced at her. She still looked absurdly youthful, I thought,

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to be so integrated a person, and the effortlessly-competent mother of four children. She was hatless and in easy country clothes, and her short dark curls, clear colouring, and general liveliness belied her thirty-five years.

"You'll be walking a good deal, I expect?"

"Yes, I'd like to. I don't get much chance these days, but I expect I'll soon find my legs. The Old Man's training dies hard."

"We're quite well placed as a starting-point for a lot of the best things," Frances said. "And the weather looks settled for once, too."

It did. We drove on into a clear sunset, through sharp, exhilarating air with recurring tangs of bonfire smoke, as we swung through an occasional village. The black, castellated tors stood out boldly against the western sky. I stretched in luxurious anticipation, and we fell into conversation again.

That night the three of us sat out the fire in talk. Frances was right. It was a good rectory of the gracious small Georgian type, roomy but without the depressing, echoing quality of a lot of unwanted and scrappily-furnished rooms. I looked round at the pleasing proportions of the drawing-room, its fresh white paint and gay chintzes, and recognised some of the watercolours and china from our old home. Catching John's eye, I grinned.

"Your lot's fallen in a pleasant place this time, old man."

"Yes." He knocked out his pipe. "There are very few problems."

The faint echo of my sister's phrase in the car struck me momentarily with something too ephemeral to be identified as disquiet. I looked at him. Did his fine-drawn sensitive face convey some impression of tension, in spite of its serenity? But it suddenly creased into laughter at some absurdity from Frances, and the matter slipped from my mind.

Uncles have their obligations, and I did not get far afield the following day, nor even on the one after that. But on the next I was up and off by nine, relaxed and comfortable in old shorts, sweater, and tried boots, with bread and cheese and a flask in my rucksack, and a stick in my hand. There had been a frost, and the rough grass crackled under my feet as I made my way on to the open moor, among tumbled rocks on the bank of a small stream. The sun gained strength. It was a pearl of days, golden, still, and yet invigorating. I went on and up, alone into the world of sky and rocks and sweeping hills that is Dartmoor.

It is no part of this story, however, to chronicle the enjoyment of that day. My round was a long one, and the sun was low as I

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began the descent of the little valley which I had followed at the outset of my walk. As I drew nearer to the village, I noticed for the first time a considerable rock-pile to my left, and reflected on how different a stretch of country can look when taken in reverse. The light was still reasonably good, so I left the track and went to investigate more closely, with thoughts of nephews and rock-climbing in mind.

I had to circumnavigate a roughly circular clump of whins, about fifteen feet in diameter, on the upper side of which I was half startled to encounter a solitary rock pillar. My mind formulated and dismissed almost instantaneously the suggestion that it was a natural formation or an unusual piece of clitter. It was obviously a menhir, about six feet in height, and hitherto completely unknown to me. I was certain that none of the standard authorities on Dartmoor referred to it. I went nearer, peering through the dusk.

The stone was reminiscent of Beardown Man, gaunt and battered through the weathering of centuries. But there was a difference, a something quite lacking in the Beardown menhir, and, I suddenly sensed, a rather disturbing something . . . The stone was not vertical; it was markedly concave on the down-stream side, and conveyed a dynamic, overwhelming impression of struggling to uproot itself.

I do not know how long I stood and stared as if hypnotised, but I suddenly seemed to surface from an ocean of time, and realised that the light was failing rapidly and that I was very cold. Relieved at having a rational excuse, I turned on my heel and made for the track. Hurrying along the slope, I fought down the sense of being followed, with every rationalisation I could think of.

At last the lights of the village came in sight, and I was safely back in the context of normality. As I walked into the Rectory hall I could think with amused tolerance of the persistence of atavistic tendencies in twentieth-century man.

Later that evening, sprawling in an armchair and smoking, I looked across the hearth at my sister, who was rapidly reducing a pile of mending.

"Fra, I had no idea that there was such a fine menhir in this part of the moor . . ." Before I could complete my sentence, but not before her darning-needle was suddenly arrested in mid air, the harsh ringing of the telephone in the hall created a diversion. She jumped up to answer it, and, having called her husband, did not return to the room. The call resulted in an impending visit from a parishioner, and John vanished into the study. Abruptly left alone, I sat for some time and wrestled with the impression

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that the interruption had been welcome. Finally, leaving the matter unresolved, I went up to bed.

I did not sleep very well, and once thought I heard talking in what must have been the small hours. But I came down to breakfast dressed for walking, and announced my intention of having another day out. Frances, I noticed, was emphatic in praise of a round based on the far side of the stream, and covering a part of the moor that I had not touched yesterday. I rather thought that she avoided my eye, and busied herself unduly in dispensing breakfast to her brood. I presently left the house with my sandwiches, in an undecided state of mind. At the point where the lane opened out on to the moor I stood for a moment, and then abruptly set out in my tracks of the previous night. I soon reached the clump of whins, rounded it, and faced the menhir.

It was roughly fashioned and much weathered, but the curious, straining concave bend was represented by the merest suggestion of a departure from the vertical. I felt myself welcoming the reassurance . . . a trick of fading light, of course . . . subconscious memories of Dartmoor legends which had terrified deliciously in childhood. Feeling rather foolish I gave the stone a critically appraising look, and turned my steps to the stream and the moor beyond it.

I completed this second day's walking rather earlier than the first, and if a teasing idea of a second visit to the menhir did enter my mind I thrust it out with vigour. Had I not cleared the matter up with my own eyes in broad daylight? As I came off the moor fast-moving high cirrus cloud was coming in from the west. It looked as if the weather were going to break, and by ten o'clock that night it had broken in earnest. John had been at meetings in Exeter, and Frances seemed rather tired, so by mutual consent we called it a day.

One noticed the weather more on going upstairs. It was a wild night with great gusts of wind buffeting the house and setting up a symphony of creaks and rustles and tappings inside it, familiar to the family and almost unnoticed by them no doubt, but which effectively prevented me from sleeping at all, tired though I was from exercise and fresh air. Finally I gave up the struggle, switched on my bedside lamp and looked at the time. It was two o'clock. I decided to go downstairs and fetch the novel which I had been reading earlier in the evening. It was unlikely that anyone would hear me through the storm.

A few moments later I was going quietly downstairs. The front door was shaking in the wind, but I noticed that the rain had stopped beating on the hall window, and flickering shafts of

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moonlight slanted across the floor. I opened the drawing-room door and without fumbling for the electric light switch made my way in the greyness to the armchair in which I had been sitting. The moon suddenly shone out strongly, and beyond the uncurtained windows the garden leapt into solidity. Afterwards I felt certain that when I first glanced out all was as usual. I did not see the menhir "come," but there was a moment at which it was there, within about six feet of the window, with the ashy whiteness of moonlit granite. Not bent and straining to escape, but leaning towards me with a supplication beyond the power of words to portray.

I must have blacked out for a moment or two, for John was kneeling beside me and splashing cold water on my face. The curtains were drawn, and the lights full on.

"I heard you go down," he said presently, "and thought I had better follow."

"You know?" I said.

"Yes. We have both seen it. It's a bit of a problem."

Frances stood in the doorway. I remember my flicker of amusement at her complete composure and bandbox appearance in a gay flowery dressing-gown.

"Tea, I think," she said. "I've put on the kettle."

Later she looked at me with something of maternal appraisement. "Sorry, old boy, but one gets over it. Selfishly, I'm thankful that you're in on it too."

"Hadn't I better hear the whole story?" I said.

So they told me.

The trouble—only I noticed that they did not call it that—dated from about a month after their arrival. They had taken an evening stroll on the moor, and on going up to the rocks had discovered the menhir with a surprise equal to my own. Both of them had received the same impression of an attempted escape.

"John said it looked as though it was trying to become airborne, and I remember saying that he had put it rather neatly."

I nodded, and they went on. That night, or rather in the early hours of the following morning, it had been seen in the garden for the first time. Frances, up with the baby who was restless from teething, had chanced to look out of their bedroom window.

"I panicked," she said, "and rushed at John and shook him awake, but when he got to the window there was nothing to be seen, and in the end I had to accept the rational explanations."

But not for long, apparently. A more dramatic and unnerving experience befell my brother-in-law a few days later. He had gone over to the vestry at dusk, and while searching for some

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papers in a cupboard had been startled by a heavy thud against the door leading into the churchyard. Going to investigate, he had found the greatest difficulty in opening it. Finally it gave to his pressure, and he stumbled outward, righting himself within three feet or so of the menhir.

"There was the smell of cold damp earth and stone," he said, "and the sense of being confronted with an impossible reality. But even stronger was the appalling strength of the misery and piteous appeal, just as you saw it tonight. And then there was nothing. I don't know how I got home."

There had been further appearances in the ensuing months, although nothing quite so tangible again. Dreading publicity, their inquiries among the local population had been tentative and cautious.

"We haven't encountered the uneasy reticence met with in similar circumstances in the best ghost stories," John went on. "In fact, I don't believe that any of the few people with whom I risked raising the subject knew of any local legend, or were even aware of the menhir's existence, but one old girl may possibly have provided a clue. I asked her if the rocks had a name, and she said, 'Th'ole volks du call un Leechy Rocks.' Leechy might be the Anglo-Saxon lic, perhaps. Corpse, you know, like lich-gate, and the lich-way."

"John," I said, not without embarrassment, for I could not quite shake off the sense of being in an utterly preposterous situation, "you believe in an omnipotent God, presumably . . .

"Can't you do a spot of exorcism, or order the thing to stop its peregrinations In Nomine Domini, so to speak?"

"Undoubtedly. But I should not dream of trying. We really know nothing about the inanimate creation, but this bit of it is clearly in need of help. I don't pretend to understand, but I can't prostitute the Name by trying to use it to bind a thing created in tension and stress."

"You see," said my sister, "whatever it is, it's not the terror by night, although I admit its comings and goings are disconcerting, especially to the uninitiated."

I collected my thoughts with a major effort, and asked John if he had any course of action in mind.

"I quite see that you don't want the press to get on to it," I said. "And, of course, you can count on me. But you might have other visitors who left by the first train and babbled of grey stones. And what about the children?"

"Exactly. Well, I have a kind of groping idea." He leaned back and extracted a Bible from a bookcase. "Joshua, chapter 4, put me on to it."

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He passed me the book. I read the account of the witnessing stones, and nodded slowly.

"I think it might be a case of its having witnessed something so ghastly that even a stone cries out . . . And this is where you come in, David. Surely, with all your contacts, you can find a discreet and sympathetic archaeologist?"

It takes time to find an archaeologist possessed not only of discretion and sympathy, but also of some leisure and of sufficient professional status to be persona grata with local learned bodies. During the winter and spring I made numerous inquiries and a few tentative approaches, but those concerned were either committed already for the forthcoming digging season or frankly uninterested. Meanwhile the international situation grew uglier and uglier, and work at my office piled up proportionately. It was only the controlled urgency of the letters from the Rectory that kept me at the search. They were guarded, but it was clear that both Frances and John were feeling the strain of the long delay, and that the menhir's appearances were continuing.

One evening in May I dropped in at my club on the way home, and ran up against a man who was up at Oxford with me.

"By the way," he said, after a brief exchange of news, "didn't I hear somewhere that you were trying to find someone to dig up prehistoric remains? Can I have got it right?"

"Dead right. It's near my brother-in-law's place in Devon. He's keen on that sort of thing."

"Well then, come and meet Uncle Bob. He's at the Institute of Pre-History, and always going off on digs. Nice old bird."

Uncle Bob, or Dr. Robert Gunscale, was a spare, weather-beaten sixty or so, with grey hair and short grey beard, and a pair of the brightest and shrewdest blue eyes I had ever seen. Over a round of drinks he said that he seldom took anything but a busman's holiday, and accepted an invitation to dine at my flat a few days later and hear further details.

He proved an easy guest. I sensed a kind of instinctive tact in him, and conversation during the meal avoided both the war threat and archaeology. He turned out to be one of those dedicated bird-watchers, and held me absorbed, although my own knowledge of birds is rudimentary. When my housekeeper had cleared away and we had settled down to our cigars, I reluctantly decided that I must get to business.

"I want you to be patient enough to listen to an absolutely incredible story related to this proposed dig," I said.

"Fire away." He stretched himself comfortably in his chair and prepared to listen. "I like incredible stories."

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I told him the whole sequence of events as I knew it. Beyond asking for further clarification of one or two points as I went along, he made no comment, and when I had finished there was so long a silence that I began to feel uncomfortable.

"I am afraid that you are probably writing off the three of us as cranks or hysterics," I said rather awkwardly.

"Neither of these things," he answered with dismissive finality. "Of course, the feature that particularly interests me is the actual stone itself." He stopped, and I sensed him making a decision not to elaborate this statement.

"Have you got an ordnance map of the area by any chance?"

I produced one. He studied it in silence for what seemed a long time, finally refolding it and handing it back.

"Thanks. Well, I've a week's leave due to me at the beginning of July, if that would suit you and your people. I should be interested to have a look at the place, and I know a couple of young chaps who would be glad to come along too. They would know nothing of your story, of course."

I thanked him with genuine sincerity, and was beginning to say something about hospitality at the Rectory when he cut me short.

"It's kind of you, but I always prefer to camp on the site—in case of any meddlers, you know. And it's better for the birds, too."

After some further discussion of plans I gave him John's address. He had another drink and he rose to go. It was surprising how, without saying a single word, he conveyed his determination not to discuss the story further.

As we went out I was conscious of a great sense of relief, and thankfully relegated the matter to the background of my mind for the time being.

It was not until six weeks later that I heard any more of him. A businesslike telephone call came through to say that his leave started on Saturday, and that he proposed to drive down with a couple of students during Friday night. Could I come too? I thought I could, but that it had better be in my own car, as I should have to make the return journey in time to be in the office on Monday morning. We arranged to go in convoy, and I undertook to guide them straight up to Leechy Rocks before I went on to the rectory.

We started off in due course, and everything, including the weather, went according to plan. I always enjoy night driving, and the cool, fresh air and empty roads were delectable after the petrol fumes and traffic jams of the London streets. We made excellent time, and just before five I drew up about half a mile

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from the village, where the moor track comes down to the road. I had warned Dr. Gunscale about the roughness of the track, but he assured me that the estate car could take anything. I climbed on board with some difficulty and we lurched forward, the car swaying and jolting alarmingly under its load of four adult males and an astonishing amount of gear of various kinds. For the first time I experienced a feeling of excitement. I wondered what the menhir would look like. This would be the fourth time I had seen it. My mind went back to the devastating moonlit moment in the Rectory dining-room.

"Those the Leechy Rocks?" Dr. Gunscale's voice broke into my thoughts.

"Yes," I said, peering round a roll of bedding. "I think there's a camp-site on a kind of shelf above the stream."

A minute later the car ground to a halt, and we extricated ourselves. I stepped down into the enormous expanse of the moor, filled with the light of early morning and the sound of the stream and of countless larks overhead. Blinking a little, I walked round the back of the car and indicated the whins with a jerk of the head before speech died on my lips.

There was no menhir there.

I felt a warning touch on my arm, and became aware that Dr. Gunscale was following me to the clump. I walked round it to the far side. There was no prostrate stone, nor newly-broken pieces of rock. Neither was there an empty socket.

"May I say that I didn't expect to find a menhir?" he said quietly.

I stared at him.

"After all," he went on, "Dartmoor is not actually a very large area, and it has been exhaustively covered from the archaeological standpoint. It is hardly within the bounds of possibility that a stone of the size you describe could have been overlooked. There is no record of a menhir here: I have been into the matter very thoroughly."

"And yet you haven't written us off as lunatics or, worse still, practical jokers," I managed to say at last.

"Far from it. You may not have 'seen' a menhir with your eyes, but I should be the last person to deny the existence of extra-sensory perception."

"But a *stone* can't experience emotion."

"Your brother-in-law might not altogether agree. What about the mountains that skip like rams? In any case, people can feel emotion intimately associated with inanimate objects. The answer is under here, I think."

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He indicated the whins as the two young men came up.

Having given an undertaking that we would leave the professionals to it until we were sent for, I presently found myself striding down the track to my car. As I turned into the Rectory gate John came out of the front door.

"The bloody stone's gone," I said succinctly, as I got out.

He looked at me.

"Is the dig off?"

"No. Gunscale seems almost to know what he's going to find. He's an amazing chap."

"Thank God for that, anyway. You'd better have some food and get to bed: you look all in."

When tea-time arrived on Sunday and we had heard nothing, I began to wonder what to do.

"What is the very latest you can stay?" John asked.

"Ten, I think. I must get back in time for a few hours' sleep before going to the office."

"Well, if no word comes, you had better go up after supper and say you can't stay, I suppose."

"I think, somehow, that we shall get a message before then," said Frances.

She was right. We were just finishing supper after evensong when the two young men appeared, to say that Dr. Gunscale suggested that we might like to go up and see the progress made to date. In answer to our inquiries they said that it had been interesting, but they were not communicative and melted away, murmuring that they were going along to the pub. Frances collected a coat and we set out.

It was a glorious evening, very still, with a brilliant sunset sky and a huge full moon sailing up from the eastern horizon. The air was full of the noiseless wheeling of bats, and an occasional belated and agitated bird was still abroad. We said very little as we walked up the track. I wondered what the others were thinking. For my own part I felt I cared only that in some way the problem should be solved, and the matter finally cleared up, so that Frances and John were troubled no longer.

As the tents came in sight we saw that two very bright lamps were alight. The whins had been cut down, and there were two piles of stones near the former site of the clump. Dr. Gunscale, seated on a wooden box, was writing at a folding-table. He got up as we approached, and came to meet us. I introduced Frances and John.

After the courtesies had been exchanged, he picked up one of the lamps and handed me the other.

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" We have made a most interesting and significant discovery," he said. " Shall we go and have a look? "

He led the way towards the site, and we saw that a large tarpaulin covered the actual excavation. He paused a moment before drawing it away. " At first you will only see what seems a meaningless jumble," he said. " But if you look carefully, it will resolve itself into something intelligible."

The two powerful lights shone into a shallow pit, full of an apparently confused mass of bones. I saw that many were broken and crushed, and, with a sudden stab of emotion, that they were all pathetically small. Then a recurring pattern resolved itself, one of little skeletons flung one upon another. I felt an absurd impulse to drop on my knee and very gently touch a tiny shattered skull lying at my feet. I heard Frances draw a deep breath.

" How could it have happened? " she whispered.

" Probably a massacre, I should think. One group in search of lebensraum liquidating another . . ."

The whine of an aircraft became audible overhead. Dr. Gunscale glanced up.

" Plus ça change . . ." he said, " I am very much afraid."

We helped him replace the tarpaulin, and walked back to the tents.

" You're in a hurry to be off, I expect," he asked me.

" Yes, I'm afraid I must go almost at once. But there's just one point I find very baffling. I see what you mean about extra-sensory perception, of course, but why the menhir? Why not the children's parents, or even the children themselves? "

" That is, of course, the most interesting feature of the whole affair. As far as we can see, the skulls are all fractured in front, suggesting that the victims were dashed against something, perhaps the menhir itself. It may have had some special significance to the conquered, and the whole business was, perhaps, a piece of calculated beastliness. Quite possibly the parents' emotions were more deeply stirred by the sacrilege than by the murders: we can't really enter into the mind of primitive man."

I said good-bye to them all up there. John undertook to write and Gunscale to contact me on his return.

" The coroner decided that an inquest was not necessary in view of the age of the bones," John's letter ran. " G is removing them for investigation by the latest scientific techniques, now that the measurements and photographs have been finished. I have put in a strong plea for ultimate burial in the churchyard here. So far we seem to have escaped undue publicity: just a

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few of the local archaeological pundits have turned up. G's suggested explanation is interesting, and convincing up to a point, but Frances and I don't think it is comprehensive enough. If the true nature of all created things is to be an expression of the mind and purpose of God, perhaps even the inanimate shrinks from being involved in a hideous outrage against it. I don't pretend to understand properly, but we both feel that this thought may be to our comfort and yours in the years ahead."

It was, for in 1945 I was one of the advance force which liberated Belsen.

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DAY OF THESE DAYS

Such a morning it is when love
Leans through geranium windows
And calls with a cockerel's tongue.

When red-haired girls scamper like roses
Over the rain-green grass,
And the sun drips honey.

When hedgerows grow venerable,
Berries dry black as blood,
And holes suck in their bees.

Such a morning it is when mice
Run whispering from the church,
Dragging dropped ears of harvest.

When the partridge draws back his spring
And shoots like a buzzing arrow
Over grained and mahogany fields.

When no table is bare,
And no breast dry,
And the tramp feeds off ribs of rabbit.

Such a day it is when time
Piles up the hills like pumpkins,
And the streams run golden.

When all men smell good
And the cheeks of girls
Are as baked bread to the mouth.

As bread and beanflowers
The touch of their lips,
And their white teeth sweeter than cucumbers.

LAURIE LEE, *The Bloom of Candles*

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SHIPS AND PARSNIPS

"In a manner of speaking," said Dai,
"man is his own master on land"

BY W. H. BOORE

A DAILY stranger in my own place," said Dai, "a daily stranger, that's me."

"What do you mean?" asked Megan, bathing him in a wifely look that was both warm and, for all her thirty years of married fatness, stimulating still.

"The sea," said Dai.

"What about it?"

"It's never the same for two minutes on end; no two waves are the same," said Dai, "and one is foreign to it at all times. The sea—" and here Dai drew himself up to his full height as if it was something more than five foot six—"the sea is not—" he fumbled for a word with a thin tongue—"the sea is not patrimoniōus."

He paused for a moment in contemplation of his own eloquence. "Whatever that may mean," he added honestly.

And so Dai wanted to sell the *Pip Emma* complete with twin screws, motors in good condition, a steadying lugsail, dinghy, and all fishing tackle. When Megan pointed out that if the sea was always different, there must be plenty of variety, Dai countered that there was nothing more humdrum, more boring, more monotonous than ceaseless change.

The argument went back and fro for a few days, with Megan pointing out that the smallholding would not provide such a fat income for the two of them without the returns from Dai's fishing, and Dai replying with the solid fact that the children were married and away, and that the capital from the sale of the *Pip Emma* would furnish farming equipment of such excellence and quantity as to change a one-woman plot into a family business in no time at all and perhaps less.

But these were reasonable contentions, and life cannot be ordered by reason—not Welsh life, at any rate, or where would the fun be? It was four nights later, with Dai back

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from another and a shorter fishing trip, that they returned to the subject.

"About that boat," said Dai, and Megan turned up the paraffin lamp to illuminate their discourse more fully and to make sure that whatever decision they reached would be remembered cheerfully.

"At sea," said Dai, "you never know what you will see, because it is always different: waves that are never the same, floating objects, unexpected fogs and clouds and winds. On land you can look at what you want: if you want a tree, you can turn to it; if you want to examine a flower, you can go to it; if you want to see a cow, you can look at a cow; if you want to see a building, you can look at a building; if you want to see a beautiful woman, you can look at you."

"Humbug," said Megan comfortably.

"In a manner of speaking," said Dai, "man is his own master on land."

"Not when I am about," Megan pointed out, reasonably enough.

Dai prevailed in the end, chiefly because Megan liked him to have what he wanted; and it would be nice, too, to have him about the place regular. "It will be like a second honeymoon," Dai said, "a second honeymoon without worrying about whether we'll take, if you see what I mean."

Perhaps there was something symbolic or prophetic in the faltering start of the intention, when Dai took to the local newspaper offices his advertisement of *Fishing-boat FOR SALE*. As Dai explained to Megan afterwards, the chap behind the counter took the advertisement as if it did not matter. "One of those polished fellows, not properly human—made from one of the new plastics, I shouldn't be surprised," said Dai, "and he read it as if it was just an advertisement and not the most important thing in the world." Dai was properly indignant. "I nearly told him I would keep the boat," said he, and he looked out of the window at the *Pip Emma* riding to her moorings where she had so long ridden between voyages. Megan looked at him looking at it, and Dai grew suddenly sheepish.

"But you did insert the advertisement?" she asked.

"Of course I did," said Dai, "but when I was disposing of a lifetime, you'd think he could say something besides, 'Seven and sixpence, please.'"

Dai went off then to clean up the boat. After all, it was important to make the best of her, if he wanted a price that would buy all the farm equipment he had in mind. In the circumstance it was natural that he should use cleaner chamois leathers and

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the best scrubbing-brush; and perhaps the thoroughness of his work explained why he took so long over it—perhaps.

In the end Megan went off to see what was keeping him. She found him sitting in the cockpit, one hand on the tiller, and a far look in his eyes. "Just taking a breather," said he.

Megan surveyed his handiwork; indeed, the *Pip Emma* sparkled—well, most of her. "You haven't touched the fore-deck," she said.

Dai performed the almost impossible feat of shuffling while sitting. "Well, no," said he.

"What about it?" said Megan.

Dai lifted his eyes then with an almost conscious effort, and gave his old Megan a look that made her feel a young one again. "The last time I cleaned the forepeak," he said, "was to take you out on a trip."

He seemed to consider that an adequate explanation for the omission; strangely enough, Megan found it so.

Now Dai had fished and Megan had cultivated, and the demands of their separate responsibilities had been fairly exhaustive, so that what Dai knew about sowing and reaping was about as much as Megan knew about bait and tackle. Next day, however, Dai rose with brisk determination to acquaint himself with his new duties; and turning a firm back on the *Pip Emma* he busied himself with the subsistence crops which lay near the house. Megan, not wishing, as she put it to herself, to embarrass the new boy, kept to the house that day and performed an energetic cleaning; and if she chose to work largely in the rooms that looked out on the harbour, the fact must have been entirely coincidental.

They had often been together, of course, at meals when Dai was ashore, but when they took lunch that day they both felt that it was something different.

"For keeps," said Dai, looking round the room as if he had newly discovered it.

And Megan, watching his pleasure, refrained from saying, "I wonder." Certainly, for all the delight Dai was taking in his new permanence, he was strangely restless.

"Those parsnips," he said at teatime, "those parsnips have got too big a draught. They'll be touching bottom if they grow much longer."

"How do you know how long they are?" asked Megan.

"I've been looking at them," said Dai.

"But you can't see how deep they go by just looking."

"Of course not," replied Dai. "Naturally, I had to take 'em up to see how they were getting on."

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"Take 'em up?" shrilled Megan. "Are you trying to ruin my parsnips? Second prize in last year's show, and first next time if some clumsy sailor doesn't muck 'em about."

"But I put them back," said Dai. "I put 'em back in exactly the same positions. I even set the foliage with a compass."

Megan closed her mouth with a snap like a trapdoor. After all, the poor fellow was new to the job; but it cost her an effort of which Dai was miserably aware. "A secretive business, this gardening," he complained, "but I'll get to the bottom of it."

"You've already done so with the parsnips," Megan snapped.

Sorry was Megan that she had been a bit hard on him; and sorry was he that he had given her cause to be. Next morning they both rose with a heart to make a go of the new arrangements, Dai with a determination to submit to Megan in all things, and Megan equally determined to give him his head, so that their difficulties were likely to be kinder if no less hard to resolve.

"After all," said Megan cheerfully over breakfast, "what are a few parsnips?"

"What indeed," said Dai, "by the time I've finished with them."

It so happened, however, that most of that morning Dai spent with a potential buyer who had come in answer to the advertisement. The two men went off together, Dai putting on his seaboots and jersey—"For the last time, perhaps," he said to Megan, as if he was glad; and Megan heard him as if he were sorry.

And so Megan was able to pat down the disturbed parsnips and take a quick look round to see what other mischief poor Dai might have been up to. There was a suspicious looseness about the potatoes, and a hint of coloration on the marrows that suggested that the spray against greenfly on the roses had been used as a growth promoter on the vegetables. Megan sighed, and began to feel a vicarious hankering after the *Pip Emma;* and her sigh changed to a shudder as she wondered what Dai would manage to do if at large with the rotary cultivator and flame-gun that he had been selecting from various catalogues. "Sailors are said to have green fingers," she told herself without conviction.

Dai came back to a quick lunch, looking as if the world had turned sour.

"How'd you get on?" she asked.

"He's not buying her," Dai answered.

"Wouldn't he pay the price?" asked Megan.

"I dunno," said Dai. "I never asked him."

Dai was pretty reticent about the whole affair, but from phrases which dripped from his lips like spit during the evening,

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she was able to understand something of what had happened. "You don't just sail on a boat," he muttered, "you sail with it."

"Yes, dear," said Megan.

"And you can't hand a dumb creature over to any master, can you?"

"No, dear," said Megan.

"There ought to be a Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Ships," said Dai. He sat for a moment still and rigid. "Damn it all," he shouted suddenly, "how would you like to see the *Pip Emma* with a covered cockpit and no mast?"

The question was rhetorical; Megan was not wanted to answer. And Dai sat, brooding on dark and dreadful visions.

There was more to Dai than memories and sentiment, however. Next day he went out and cleaned the forepeak, too. And when he returned, he did not even enter the house to greet his lady, but went straight on to the fields as if he was sailing over them. "I won't touch anything," he called over his shoulder, "I'll just get to know the place."

He lurched outwards heavily. Then he turned, and seemed more cheerful. "I'll take a tape measure and my pocket compass," he said. "Perhaps I'll chart the place. After all, you can't go far without charts." The thought seemed to give him some comfort. "Charts," he said again, "that's what's wanted. We'll set our course together, you and I, Megan."

But he returned an hour or so later with a heavy tread and a full notebook. "What's the good?" he asked. "You can get to know the whole place in half a day. Nothing happens, if you see what I mean."

"When you sell the boat," said Megan, "plenty can happen. We'd get a tractor, for one thing; and we could put a field to potatoes by turning up the rows with a plough."

Dai brightened at that. "Let's look at the potatoes we've got," said he.

They went out together then, while the Midas-touch of the late sun turned all their holding into red gold. As they stood, hand in hand, before the spread of vegetables, Dai for a moment recovered his lost vision. "Beautiful," he said, "so still."

And for Megan, too, something of that vision which he had shared with her a few days back, returned. She saw them about their business together for as long as they should last; and in the mood of the moment, she did not stop to question the nature of the particular business that should keep them united.

"Beautiful," said Dai again, "and I like potatoes." He waved a hand at the haulms swaying gracefully on their earthen

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crests, " I like potatoes; they carry their flowers like flags and their leaves like rigging; and see how they ride the waves."

Understanding, even between the long-loving, is sometimes a slow and muffled process; but on occasion it is quick and clear, and thus it was with Megan at that moment.

" Are you sure," she asked as she gazed upon the crop, with its earthen ridges touched by the setting sun, and the little valleys between as dark as the troughs of the sea when the light falls level to its ending, " are you sure it is not the waves you are seeing? "

For almost a minute Dai stood, sunk in his sailorman self, looking out upon the long watery years. But Dai had never failed to bring a voyage to its completion yet, and he suddenly pulled his shoulders back, thrust his jaw forward, and planted his feet square upon the uncertain motions of this world. " The thing is," said he, " for me to find my place in the scheme. Now, I am a dab hand with motors; if I hadn't been pretty good with motors, the old *Pip Emma* would have finished her career many times."

" Not more than once," Megan pointed out.

" You know what I mean," said Dai. " Now, it seems to me that we must make the most of me. Let's hire a tractor until we can buy one from the proceeds of selling the boat."

" Nothing to use the tractor for at this season."

" The very time," said Dai, lifting his nose and sniffing eagerly the swelling tracks of soil, " the very time for me to get in a little practice."

In the end they agreed that Dai should pull a plough to break up the soil of one small field that had been used as a rooting and scratching place for pigs and chickens, and Dai retired that night both satisfied and excited—a mixed condition that made him dream of sailing the old *Pip Emma* over oceans of soil with a plough instead of a dinghy hitched on to the stern.

" I've always been used to a tiller to steer with," Dai explained to the equipment hiring firm, " so I want a tractor with a handle instead of a wheel."

Proud Dai felt, sitting higher upon his tractor than he had ever sat in his cockpit; proud he felt, without for a moment thinking of what pride goeth before. Proud he would have continued if a hedge—a hedge that up till then had looked so quiet and peaceful and well-meaning—had not suddenly turned in on him and collided with him. " The thing was running alongside as proper as could be," Dai pointed out when the crunching of earth and the toppling of bushes had ended in a silence as deep as when the grandfather-clock stopped on the day

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Uncle Alfie died, " running alongside but a bit close, so I took evasive action."

" Not very," said Megan.

" It's this rudder in front that upsets me," said Dai. " I pushed the tiller to starboard for turning to port, and she went contrariwise. But I am learning."

Dai was, indeed, learning; and his steering was unexceptionable when he took the five-foot-wide tractor through a four-foot-wide gap and shaved six inches precisely off the banks each side.

" You'd think," he said bitterly as he walked back to recover the things, " you'd think the mudguards would have been fixed on properly, wouldn't you? "

" As a pattern," said Megan, looking at the curved and criss-crossed furrows of depths varying between one and eight inches, " as a pattern, even Picasso couldn't have bettered it."

" Picasso could paint out what he didn't want," said Dai, " but tell me, how do you lift a hole that's in the wrong place? "

" Let's have a cup of tea," said Megan, and they set off together for the little house at the other side of the field. Dai looked back once. The tractor, slightly tilted and with its exhaust-stack at an angle like the mast of a ship with a permanent list, waited on the slope behind them, rigid and stiff and arrested.

" It looks—it looks somehow . . . " said Dai. He fumbled for a word. " It looks, somehow, sore."

What happened next, in fact, had nothing to do with the tractor; it could have happened to anyone. To anyone, that is, who, ignorant of the violence built in to the common or garden rake, might have dropped it prongs upwards as Dai had done earlier. When, suddenly, as he walked with Megan, the rake-handle rose and struck him dead centre on his forehead. He was not even surprised because he was unconscious.

He was brought round by a mixture of sweet words and brandy, both administered by Megan, who then dabbed butter on the bruise—the best Welsh not the New Zealand cooking quality, for Dai was her Dai and his comfort cheap at four shillings a pound.

One cannot have too much of a good thing, and the liquor which Megan used to revive him was three-star at least; with the result that when a new prospective buyer turned up to see the *Pip Emma*, Dai, brandied and buttered, was ready for him.

" You look," said Megan, gazing on his well-daubed forehead, " you look a slippery customer."

As Dai and the newcomer went down to the quay, Megan noticed her husband glancing back at the tractor and forward to the boat, and Megan herself did a bit of thinking at the same time about the same two things.

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When Dai came back—alone—he had a sort of shifty confidence about him.

"What happened?" asked Megan. "Was it price this time?"

Dai nodded.

"Wouldn't he pay a thousand quid?"

"I asked fifteen hundred," said Dai.

Megan gasped. "That's a ridiculous figure," she said.

Dai stood rock firm, as if he were on his own rolling deck. "Fifteen hundred," he said again.

"I am afraid you will never get it," said Megan.

Dai scratched his head and looked a little shamefaced. "At one moment," he admitted, "I was afraid I would."

He looked out of the window at the *Pip Emma*, and his sigh was like a whisper of wind about her rigging when the air was soft and slow.

"You're a bigger humbug than ever," said Megan.

"Well, you see," said Dai sadly, "it is difficult; it hurts me to think I may have wasted money on that advertisement."

He looked at Megan as if he had handed her something and was watching to see what she would do with it. It was up to her, and they both knew it.

"What," she asked softly, "what is a mere seven-and-six compared to what we should get for the land?"

"The land?"

Megan nodded. "If we sold the holding, think what you could do with the capital; think of the new equipment you could get for the boat."

Dai did as he was bid. He thought.

"An electric capstan," he said, "and a refrigerated compartment in the bows; and perhaps a little gutting-machine."

"You could make twice as much from your fishing as you do now," said Megan.

But the light died from Dai's eyes. Slowly he shook his head. "And who's to handle it? I'd have to take a man with me, and pay him the extra profit."

Megan looked at him hard. It was a peculiar thing that, however fat Megan had become—or, as Dai would put it, however well she had filled out—her eyes remained as young and as bright as ever, to show him "that she was always there." Dai took her hand and held it; held it, and waited.

"You could have a crew," she said.

Then she grinned; a wicked, almost a girlish grin. She patted her spreading hips.

"You could have a crew," she said, "you could have an ample crew."

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SHOEMAKER'S DAUGHTER

When she smiled he felt as if sunlight reflected from her face

BY HARRY MARK PETRAKIS

ELIAS Perdakis had been a shoemaker for thirty-five years. He was a short and stocky man in his early sixties, with sad brown eyes that squinted through thick-lensed glasses at the soles and heels he repaired. His fingers were scarred by numerous cuts, and the nails were chipped and broken. His hands had been stained so black by the years of polish and dye that he could no longer scrub them into appearing clean.

He had occupied the same shabby and stove-heated store in Harrison Street since the day he repaired his first pair of shoes. For thirty-five years, through a depression and a war, he hammered and pounded on the iron last and trimmed the heels against the cutter. He worked from early in the morning through the day and well into evening. At night he locked up and unhappily walked the mile to his house.

Elias was married and had four daughters. The youngest was twenty and the eldest was twenty-eight. His wife, Xenia, was a grim and bitter woman who counted the years she had spent with him wasted and lost.

Often during the day while pounding on the iron last, Elias tried to recall what had prompted him to marry. He had never felt any strong physical attraction for his wife. He had been a silent and withdrawn young man without any special ambition. He enjoyed working with his hands, and in an old pair of shoes made almost new by soles and heels and polish he saw the results of his labour. When he met Xenia, who was aggressive and had a great loud laugh that he mistook for good humour, he thought perhaps these qualities would make up for his own disabilities. She, in turn, was confident she could mould him into the kind of man she wanted and could not obtain because of her savage disposition.

"What is it about shoemaking?" she began her tirades not long after they were married. "Is it a profession like medicine

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or the law that a man should want to dedicate his life to it?"

"It is my trade," Elias answered quietly. "You knew I was a shoemaker when you married me."

"I considered it a beginning," she said. "I hoped you might some day progress to a grocery or a restaurant and hire a few people to work for you. Attain a measure of proper pride for yourself and your family."

"I am a shoemaker," Elias said. "Somebody has to mend shoes. It is my trade."

For ten years they struggled. She grew angry and bitter. He remained silent and stubborn. When she realised that she could not change him, she denounced him with vehement scorn.

"A shoemaker!" she cried. "It is what you are and what you deserve to be! I used to think you were fit for something better but you have found your place. Hammer and pound and mend the filthy and broken shoes of better men. Stain and cut your hands so they are a disgrace for people to see. A shoemaker you were born and a shoemaker you will die!"

From this vagrant and unhappy union their daughters were born, peevish children passing through the stages of childhood without grace.

His eldest daughter, Amalia, had a body like the neck of a giraffe. Her dresses hung on her in shapeless folds. The knowledge that she was probably doomed to spinsterhood had turned her sour. She read death notices in the paper with dark and avid satisfaction.

There was Verona who was twenty-six and corseted with great cushions of fat round her waist and thighs. She ate fiercely at meals and relentlessly between meals. When she was not eating she voraciously digested the lurid content of confession magazines.

Take Minerva who was twenty-four. At times Elias shamefully admitted to himself he wished devoutly someone would. She resembled her mother so closely he would start when she entered the room. They had the same cold eyes and thin bloodless lips and harsh and unyielding voices. They were twin blades of the same knife.

If it had not been for his youngest daughter, Diana, he might have run away long before. She was a balm to his loneliness, and the justification for whatever he endured. He suspected sometimes to look at her that she was not his child, although he could not believe his wife capable of attracting a lover.

Diana was of middle height and slender and her eyes were a luminous blue. Her hair was taffy-coloured and silky, while the

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hair of her sisters was dark and coarse. She talked softly and walked with grace. When she smiled he felt as if sunlight reflected from her face.

Early each day when he had been at work only a short while, Diana joined him and they drank their morning coffee together.

She was vibrant with energy and could not sit still for long. She walked in a lithe dance along the counter and picked up a massive shoe. "This man must be a giant!" she said. "I have never seen a shoe as big before."

"He is a big man," Elias laughed. "Big and very heavy. Three times as heavy as Verona."

She walked on and paused again before a delicate pair of ladies' shoes with high tapered heels. "These must belong to a beautiful woman," she said. "A woman who spins men's heads when she passes. She is a beautiful woman, isn't she, Papa?"

He looked intently at the shoes and tried to remember their owner, whether she was tall or short and light or dark. He shrugged helplessly.

"Oh, Papa!" Diana laughed. "You need new glasses if you cannot remember such a beautiful woman."

"How can you be sure she is beautiful?" Elias asked. "You can tell nothing from her shoes. The poor woman may be a fright."

"She is beautiful," Diana said, "because I wish her to be beautiful. It is as easy as that." She finished with a firm nod of her head and walked a few steps farther along the counter. She picked up a pair of sturdy old brogues, coarse and strong, and frequently repaired with new soles and heels. "These belong to a sombre old man," she said. "No nonsense or foolishness about him." She made a forbidding face and puffed out her cheeks. "He plants one foot solidly on the ground before raising the other."

Elias threw up his hands in amazement. "They belong to old Charley Neilsen," he said. "He is exactly the way you describe."

"I knew it!" she said in triumph. She whirled for a moment and then paused in the centre of the small silent shop. She raised her finger soberly to her lips.

"I am listening," Elias said. "Tell me your wisdom."

"Papa, stop it," she said. "I am very serious."

"Forgive me," Elias said earnestly, and tried to control a smile.

"I see a vision of many people," she said gravely. "All the men and women who bring their shoes into your shop to be repaired. Beautiful women in tapered heels, as haughty as Elizabethan court ladies, and young men with faces as handsome

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as Adonis in fine grained leathers, and sturdy old men like Charley Neilsen. They take the shoes you mend and repair and walk in them all over the city and perhaps all over the country. They fly in your shoes to Paris and Bombay and Copenhagen and Melbourne. They walk on strange streets with lovely names in shoes that you have mended in this shop."

"Come down to earth now, my baby," Elias said, and winked at her with affection. "Pour me another cup of coffee. No sugar." He shook his head and smiled. "If the truth were known, all my customers probably live within the radius of a mile and never leave the ground except on Saturday nights when they float off the stools at the Macedonian bar." But secretly he delighted in the wild free flights of her fancy and thought of them for hours when he was alone.

She poured him another cup of coffee and then looked at the clock on the wall. She clapped her hands in agitation. "I'll be late!" she said.

"You don't have to be in school for almost an hour yet," Elias said.

She came and stood for a moment beside him. She put her slim arms round his shoulders and leaned her head against his cheek. And he felt a great comfort in her embrace.

"Papa," she said quietly, "there is this young man in school. He is tall with fine and sensitive eyes. He has asked to take me out several times, but Mamma says no." She stared in sudden shame at her hands. "I meet him in the morning for coffee. We have lunch together several times a week. Only for the past two weeks. I have begun to like him very much."

"Coffee here with an old man and then coffee again with a young man," he teased her gently. "You take care or you will float into class." He tapped the tip of her small slim nose. "What boy is this? Is he the husky Polish boy you liked last year or the young anarchist who wants to abolish all prisons?"

"Neither one," she said vigorously. "The Polish boy was Ziggy Orchowski who played varsity football. He was big and strong, but that lost charm when he tried to hug me like I was a football." She gave a wise little nod of her head. "The anarchist was Harry Bobbins. He was very eloquent. He left school and is working for his father selling sewing-machines. Can you imagine an anarchist selling sewing-machines?" She was silent and pensive for a moment. "There have been a few other boys," she said. "I enjoyed being with them and even let them kiss me because I enjoyed that too, but Lenny Carr is different."

"Different in what way?" Elias asked.

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"In many ways," she said. "He is serious and yet has a fine sense of humour. He is in the top ten per cent of his class and yet he is not bookish or stiff about what he knows. He wants to teach, and speaks of teaching as if it were the most wonderful thing a man could do. He will have his degree this coming June, and then he will return to San Francisco where his parents live and take some graduate work there." She kissed her father lightly on the cheek and rose. "I like him very much," she said. "I guess I really do."

She picked up her books and started to the door.

"You know what your mother says." Elias shrugged wryly. "You must not marry until at least one of your sisters has married. You are the youngest, and she feels you must not be the first."

"Papa," she said—and her voice quivered in indignation—"I might have to wait until I am an ancient relic." She opened the door and started out and then stuck her head back in. "Papa," she said, "how long has it been since I told you how much I love you?"

"Yesterday," he smiled, and waved good-bye.

After Elias arrived home from work in the evening and sat down with his wife and daughters to eat, they deluged him with their complaints.

"I must have a new dress," Minerva said. "I have not had a new dress in months. My clothes are rags. I am ashamed to be seen on the street."

"You have two new dresses for every one of mine," Amalia said. "You think because you are younger you deserve more."

"What would either of you do with new dresses?" Verona giggled. "No man comes near either one of you."

"You keep your fat little mouth closed!" Minerva said furiously. "Better a stick than an elephant like you."

"It's not our fault," Amalia said with a grieving whine in her voice. "I am ashamed to bring a young man into this house. It needs a new coat of paint and some carpeting in the hall where it is worn out. There are one or two young men at the office I might invite home but I am too ashamed."

His wife, Xenia, cast a malicious look at Elias. She encouraged the dissension and stopped it only when she felt he had absorbed enough.

"I am sure I am doing all I can," Amalia said. "I work and buy my own clothes but I can't afford the upkeep and care of this house as well." She cast a spiteful look at her sisters. "It might help if some of you got a job."

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" I am working at the hospital," Minerva said. " I don't get paid but it provides me an opportunity to mix with girls of high social position. I am expecting an invitation to some of their homes for the holidays. They certainly don't have to worry about new dresses, because their fathers have fine positions with marvellous incomes."

" Where would I work? " Verona tittered. " You know I am under a doctor's care. He tells me I must lose weight."

" You might try to find work in a candy factory," Amalia said acidly.

" She would eat up her salary in chocolate creams every week," Minerva sneered. She looked with irritated jealousy at Diana who sat eating silently. " Of course," Minerva said, " this little sister not only does not work but has to have money for college tuition too. That is an expense we could do without."

For the first time Elias spoke a little sharply. " She helps me in the store after class," he said. " She works with me at the weekend. She more than earns her tuition and clothing."

Minerva tried grimly to meet her father's eyes. Then, perhaps remembering that she had never set foot in the shop herself, she lowered her head with a flustered motion. " Something has to be done," she grumbled. " There never seems to be enough money to meet our needs. Something has to be done."

Diana could keep silent no longer. " Papa does all he can for us," she said with her voice trembling. " He works hard for almost twelve hours a day. We have no reason for complaint or to expect him to work harder than that."

" A man makes himself what he is," their mother said sombrely. " Some men are destined for prestige and position and find their way there. Other men are destined to be drudges working on the broken shoes of other men, spending their days hammering little nails into rubber soles and heels." She swept the table with her savage and recurring complaint. " He could have gone into another business. He could have made something of himself. I would have helped him in any way I could. But he has never wanted to better himself. He was born a shoemaker and will remain one all his life."

" That is not fair! " Diana cried. " That is not fair! " Elias made a furtive sign at her to keep silent but she would not stop. " We live on his labour. The hours he spends in the store provide the food we eat and the clothes we wear and the roof over our heads. We have never gone cold or hungry."

" What about our social position? " Minerva flared. " How can we find husbands if young men do not respect us? How can they respect us if they know our father is a shoemaker? "

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Amalia and Minerva looked at their father with furious reproach. He did not blame them too much because he knew they merely echoed their mother. Verona, who because of her bulk had long ago sublimated her wish for a husband in a cocoon of sweets and confession magazines, enjoyed their distress. Diana made a mute gesture of consolation towards Elias.

"There will be men to marry you," their mother said. "I work and plan for this every day and night. There is a small dowry to help each of you. I have scraped and saved for that. Each in her turn."

"Diana is the only pretty one," Verona smirked at her sisters. "Any man would want her. My two scarecrow sisters haven't got a chance."

"I am sick of your insults, you overstuffed cow!" Minerva shrieked. "I will tear out your stringy hair!"

"Men are foolish and fickle animals—" Amalia wiped a vagrant tear from her eye—"they think a pretty face is all that matters."

"Enough," their mother said in a sharp strong voice that rang down a curtain. The girls became quiet but still seethed like minor volcanoes. "Each one in her turn," their mother said with a stony glitter in her eyes. "Diana will not marry before at least one of you does. It would be a further reflection on this sad family if she did. She will have to wait and make the best of it. And if none of you marry, if all my efforts fail—" she silenced Amalia's moan of dismay with a stern wave of her hand—"we will make the best of that too." She paused, and her eyes caught like the talons of a hawk at Elias. "We will remain together in this house and year after year your father will hammer and pound and pound and hammer to take care of us."

The spring that year came early in April. Overnight it seemed the winter fled. There was a morning when Elias walked to his shop and felt the first faint stirring of a warmer sun. He unbuttoned his coat and smiled at the sky. Later he saw a cluster of violets blooming in a barren winter garden. And outside his shop a swarm of pigeons sensing the spring whirled up in widening circles of delight.

With the coming of spring, Diana brought Lenny Carr to share their coffee in the shop in the morning. In the beginning, without knowing clearly why, Elias resented the young man. He considered him an intruder and for a few weeks tolerated him only because he did not wish to hurt Diana. One day, listening to them laugh together, he understood with a twinge of shame and remorse that he was jealous. He determined to overcome

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his affliction, and he almost succeeded. When he could watch and listen to the young man without bias, he developed a liking and respect for him. He began to enjoy the mornings the three of them spent together, but there were still moments when Diana and Lenny talked excitedly to each other and he could not suppress a feeling of sadness because it was obvious they had forgotten he was there. He knew before long they were deeply in love.

He was not for that reason too surprised when they came to him one morning in the second week of June and told him they planned to run away and be married.

"Papa, there is no other way," Diana said. "For months we have talked and talked. When Lenny received his degree yesterday we decided we would elope at once. We will say nothing except to you."

Elias listened and tried to separate his pleasures and his apprehensions. He was happy for them, a little sad at his own loss, and disheartened when he considered his wife's fury. He looked intently at the young man and felt reassured.

"I am sorry, sir," Lenny said, with a flush of excitement in his cheeks. "It is not right, I know, to take her away like this. I would like her to have a big church wedding and to wear a white gown." His voice softened and he took Diana's hand. "She would make a beautiful bride. But she feels there is no chance that her mother would ever consent."

"She is right," Elias said sadly.

"We are leaving for San Francisco this morning," Lenny went on. "My family is out there. They will meet us and we will be married in a simple church ceremony. I will work this summer and in the fall return to college for another two years. My father has promised to help us."

"I will help you too," Elias said quickly. "I will send you something from time to time. If you need anything you must promise to write me."

"No, Papa," Diana said. "We don't need money from you. We will be all right."

They stood in silence for a few long moments. There were things Elias wished to say but felt reluctant because he was ashamed of how they would sound before the young man. Lenny glanced uneasily at the clock on the wall. "We better go in a few moments," he said. "We have a train to catch." He extended his hand earnestly to Elias.

"I will take good care of her, sir," he said. "I promise you that. Don't worry."

"I know you will," Elias said.

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Lenny walked quickly to the door. "I'll wait outside," he said. He left Elias and Diana alone.

They stood for a moment in awkward silence. He saw the tears glitter suddenly on her cheeks. He motioned for her to come to him and she came quickly into his arms and held him so fiercely she almost knocked his glasses from the bridge of his nose. "Papa," she said, and shook her head furiously to catch her breath, "you must know how I feel. I am happy to be going away with Lenny, but unhappy at leaving you alone. We have helped each other, you and I. Now I have someone else and you will be left alone."

"Never mind me." Elias managed a consoling nod. "He is a good young man and you love each other. That is what is most important." Then he held her slightly away and wiped her tears with his fingers. "You better go, my baby," he said gruffly to cover emotion. "You better go. Don't worry about me. Look after yourself and your man."

"They will blame you," Diana said in distress. "They will be furious and take it out on you."

"Never mind about that." Elias sought to comfort her. "I have listened to them for years. Another toot on their unhappy horns won't hurt me. You go now. Don't worry."

She started away from him and then paused at the door. She looked back at him once more. "Papa," she said softly, "how long has it been since I told you how much I love you?"

"Yesterday, you foolish girl," he said, and turned quickly away so she would not see the tears in his own eyes. He heard the relentless closing of the door.

After a moment he walked to the window and peered out. The pavement was bright with summer sun. They had crossed the street and were walking quickly and close together. For a frantic moment he thought of closing his shop for good and going with them. He could establish a small shoemaker's shop in San Francisco and could help them until Lenny finished college. Even as he considered this prospect he knew how futile it was. He was an old man, set in his ways, and his destiny decided. As miserable as his life was, he could not abandon his family. There were ties of flesh and blood that could not be forgotten.

At the dinnertable that night Elias told them that Diana was gone.

"Gone?" his wife said. She stared at him with her eyes open to great bursting cups.

"Gone?" Amalia said.

"Gone where?" Minerva said.

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Verona listened eagerly hoping her sisters might be snared in some new distress.

"She has eloped with her young man," Elias said quietly. "He has taken her across the country to be married. She has gone to make a life of her own away from here."

"Gone!" Amalia said, shocked.

"Married!" Minerva said.

"Eloped!" Verona clapped her plump fingers in excitement.

"How could she?" Amalia cried in anguish.

"She could have waited," Minerva said furiously. "She was supposed to have waited until one of us married."

"She would have had to wait for you for ever," Verona snickered.

"You shut up, you fat little devil!" Minerva shrieked.

Their mother raised a cry for silence, and with a fierce sweep of her hand motioned them from the room. Amalia fled with her handkerchief to her eyes. Minerva stalked angrily after her. Verona scampered out, chewing on a piece of bread and butter. Elias and his wife were left alone.

"This is your doing," Xenia said. She shook her head slowly at first and then more rapidly as her anger rose.

"This is your doing. You encouraged her. You helped her plan to do this."

"He is a good young man," Elias said. "They care for each other. They will be happy."

She went on as if she had not heard him. "You did this," she ranted. "This is your doing." She waved a furious finger at him. "I won't tolerate this!" she cried wrathfully. "I will make them pay. I will find out who he is and make them trouble. He was probably a boy from school and I will find out who he is. I will notify the police that he has abducted her. I will let everyone in the community here know what kind of daughter she is. I will fix her so that she will want to come crawling back. I promise you that!"

"You will do nothing." Elias spoke in slow and measured tones. "She is of age, and besides she has my consent. In addition you will keep your mouth shut about her." He was surprised at the hard flat ring of his voice and the look of shock on her face.

"You will not spread a single word of venom about her, and you will advise your daughters not to open their mouths. If any of you do, I swear before God I will close the store and abandon you all for good. I will no longer work and no longer bring you home a dime. I do not care if I go to gaol, I swear you will get nothing from me."

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He was silently elated to see a swift shadow of fear sweep her face.

He had never dared to speak to her like that before and she knew he was telling the truth. Her lips trembled with indignation. She tasted his warning in bitter and silent fury, and he knew by her swollen silence that she would not cross him on that.

He rose from his chair to leave the room. She struggled fiercely to find some other way to strike him back. Then a venomous triumph glittered in her eyes. "All right—" she spoke in a low dark whisper—"you'll have your way about that, but who will comfort you now?" She paused to savour the effect of her words. "When the bedlam was the worst, you heard only her voice. When we sat at the table together, she was the only one you saw. She came to the store to hold your stained and weary hand. She has gone to make a life without you now. She will forget you. What will you do without your darling daughter now?"

A great chill of despair swept his body. He turned away quickly so it would not show on his face and left the room.

The summer passed. Autumn came and moved fitfully into winter. The last of the dry brown leaves that survived the twilight street fires were blown away by the first chilled gusts of wind. The days grew shorter. Dusk advanced like a knife into the day as the winter nights closed down.

In the dark of the winter dawn, Elias rose and dressed and walked briskly to his shop a mile away. Once inside he quickly stirred up the coals in the stove and added fresh fuel. He walked around, stamping his feet to keep warm. He put on his pot of coffee and when it began to boil he watched the door pensively and missed Diana the most.

But his loneliness was appeased slightly each day by the arrival of the mail. Diana wrote every day, not long letters, but short jubilant ones that he pieced together as if they were segments in a puzzle to decipher the substance of her life. He kept them stored in clean boxes under his counter and re-read them many times. After a while he knew the house in which she lived, the furniture they bought, the neighbours who lived on either side of them. He knew Lenny's progress at college and of their dreams and joys. When she was troubled he knew that too, and did not fret too much because that also was a part of life.

As the months passed and he continued to receive her letter each day, a strange thing happened to him. Her life began to seem more real to him than his own. And when she wrote him she was going to have a baby, he cried with quiet joy, and then

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pounded his iron last with furious vigour for the rest of the day.

He said nothing about her at home. In the beginning she had written once or twice to her sisters and mother, but they returned her letters unopened. Her name was no longer mentioned in the house.

Elias felt sorry for his daughters. He understood the bitter years from which they had come and the bleak years into which they would go. He tried to be more tolerant of their complaints. By accepting more shoes than he could regularly repair and staying later at the store for almost two months he had the house painted and a new rug installed in the hall.

When he looked at the sombre faces of his daughters he thought of Diana and the baby growing within her body. He remembered her warmth and gentleness and took a sharp pleasure in anticipating the devoted mother she would be. He regarded the birth of a grandchild as a treasure of incomparable value.

For the first time in thirty years, Elias felt at peace.

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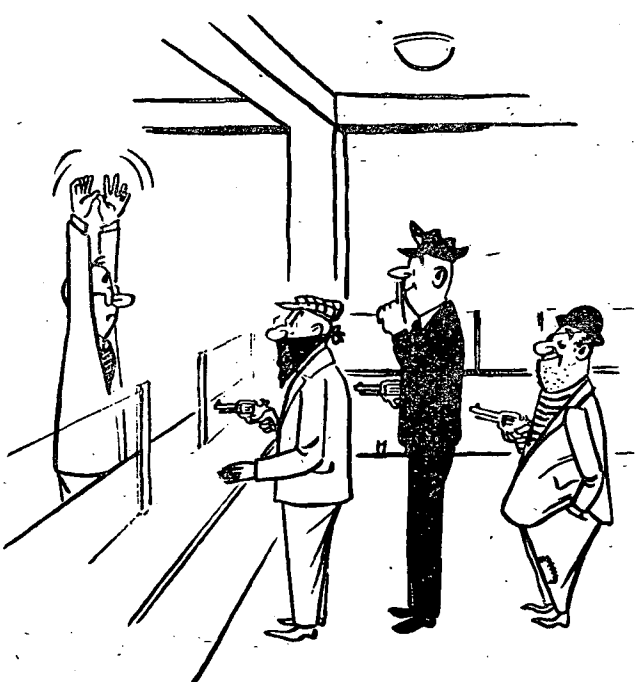

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BAIL OUT

by Jacob Hay

BAIL stood aside to let the tall, lean man pass, noting with ancient disapproval not unmixed with envy the impeccable tailoring, unmarred by even a slight bulge beneath the shoulder where the .25 Beretta hung in its chamois-leather holster.

"Morning, James," Bail muttered, suppressing a sneer.

"Jacob," came the murmured, casual reply, and Bail glared with undisguised hatred at the arrogant carriage of the retreating back. Damned snob. Still carrying that damned trick attaché case.

"M will see you now," Miss Moneypenny said pleasantly. Her warm brown eyes were sympathetic, taking in Bail's appearance: the ex-W.D. dispatch rider's mac, the sagging tweed trilby, the shabby fringe of untrimmed moustache beneath the bulbous, red-veined nose. Bail ignored her and limped into the well-remembered office, the enormous weight of his Webley, fitted with its special shoulder stock and knife bayonet, dragging at his left leg, to which it was tightly strapped beneath the unpressed corduroy of his trousers.

"Double-Oh Ten," M said in the well-remembered voice, gazing with clear, hard eyes at one of the few men the Service licensed to kill. "Back from Basingstoke, eh? Nasty bit of business, that." M motioned to a chair. "Sit down and I'll tell you why I've sent for you."

Bail eased himself into a chair, favouring the artificial rib-cage that was a souvenir of his first encounter with SMASH, dreaded murder branch of the Monacan secret security forces. From his pocket he extracted his tin cigarette box, its W. D. & H. O. label rubbed off during the recent affray with the Purple Matricides and, opening it, carefully rolled himself a smoke. "Don't bother," he growled above the flaring match. "I've come to tell you I'm getting out."

So there it was. He had finished with it; he had finally had enough of the ceaseless danger, the grinding tension, the gnawing fear of the unguarded moment, the awful loneliness of the Service. Yes, and the compound fractures, the skin grafts, the trepannings that went along with the double-oh.

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M's eyes were dangerous. "You know better than that, Jacob." The voice held a tone Bail had never heard M employ before. There was a naked ruthlessness in the air now, and Bail knew well that M's reputation for cold-blooded efficiency had not been won for nothing. "Double-oh agents do not leave the Service." There was flat finality in the words.

"This one is," Bail replied calmly, heedless of the embers that kept drifting away from the glowing tip of his swiftly yellowing cigarette. He raised bloodshot eyes to return the terrible stare coldly. "And you won't stop me." Suddenly he knew that he had never been in greater peril in his life, but he was committed now to the attack, and there was no turning back. He measured the distance between the desk and his chair, his mind ticking over like a seven-jewel watch, and decided there would be just time to unstrap the Webley if things got sticky.

"Why shouldn't I stop you?" Was there an edge of fear there?

"I think you know," Bail said steadily. "And I wouldn't try anything drastic. There's a recorded letter, giving the details, in the hands of every editor in London, to be opened in the event of my—ah, accidental death."

"You cheap bastard!" M spat out the words.

"Don't make me do it," Bail urged softly. "Don't force me to blow your cover." And between them hung the memory of other, better times and victories shared: Dr. Fang, the Woking podiatrist; the Bulgarian Cypher, and the unspeakable Colonel Fodor, SMASH . . .

Suddenly the slim, erect figure behind the desk crumpled, acknowledging check, with one move to mate. There was no triumph in Jacob Bail's voice when he broke the silence; abruptly, he felt duller than he usually felt, aware that a crucial part of his life was finished, that he could never, now, undo what he had done.

"I knew you'd see reason." He spoke gently, heaving himself painfully to his feet, favouring the aluminium knee-cap that was his continuing reminder of a certain evening with the incredibly voluptuous Starke Nayquette, Colonel Fodor's blonde mistress. "Good-bye, then." There was no reply. "Good-bye, Em," Bail said, and left the office quietly.

Behind her desk, Mrs. Emma Louise Fogle buried her face in her hands and wept, her thin shoulders shaking with the bitterness of defeat and loss.

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With due respect to James Bond and Ian Fleming

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EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY

She was shocked at herself—
whatever was she thinking of?

BY ALAN R. SCOTT

HE WAS handsome and dead. Had mankind progressed or regressed to selective breeding prior to his demise, his loss would have been a calamity indeed. For in his jeans were genes that, properly mated, would have produced a superior product physically and intellectually. It would have been a breed to answer half of Hitler's dream—blond, straight, strong and fearless, but happily devoid of the paranoic hatred that filled the other half of the madman's vision. For Jeffrey Fenshaw never really hated anyone, and in a way it was very unkind of Mildred to put a bullet through one ear and out the other.

Of course, æsthetically, it was the neatest way to do it. The holes are already there and it does make a clean job. Waiting until he was asleep was thoughtful. It showed a certain lack of malice that removed it from the Hollywood cliché of " take that and that and that."

Headlines never really dig far beneath the surface. *Landlady Murders Student Boarder* wasn't a good summary at all. *Landlady* sounds so cranky and prissy and Mildred was hardly that. She was mousy and quiet but generally quite goodnatured for a forty-five year old widow. Her face had more than a trace of beauty that hinted of a happier day and she would have been considered a fine figure of a woman, prior to the advent of the slimming craze.

Jeffrey understood her and she understood Jeffrey and they had an agreement. That's where all the trouble began, because Tuesday night was one of Mildred's nights. That was part of the understanding. They never put it in writing, but that's the way it worked out over the four years that Jeffrey lived there, while he studied for his doctorate.

In return for room and board, Tuesday and Thursday nights belonged to Mildred. On the surface it seemed like a simple and completely equitable arrangement. However, in all fairness to

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Jeffrey, the penalty for breach of contract should have been more explicitly stated. But at the original meeting of the minds, the details were never completely clear. They just worked themselves out as partial performance of the oral agreement, and made it a binding contract.

It's really amazing what a glass of lemonade accomplished because, in a way, that was the initial quid pro quo. Jeffrey cut lawns for extra money. In this day and age it was nice to see a young man work with his hands to earn his education, and they were such strong yet strangely sensitive hands. Mildred used to watch them push against the handle of the lawnmower, the knuckles white from the strain, the arms taut and moist with perspiration. It reminded her of O'Toole in *Lawrence of Arabia.*

This particular Tuesday, it was hot and Jeffrey's hands, arms, and back, were more than moist; they ran with streams of earnest sweat that soaked his waistband and blotted right through his jeans. When he finished the lawn, it seemed only the decent thing to invite him in for a glass of lemonade. He accepted; and when he came into the kitchen he offered to put on his shirt, but Mildred said, " Heavens no, my husband always used to sit around with his shirt off."

He didn't answer, and she felt strangely uncomfortable. Why had she mentioned Henry, she thought. He hadn't crossed her mind for some time. Not that she hadn't loved Henry, because she had, but everyone had said, " Now you mustn't sit around and mope. After all you're still a young woman and Henry's dead and there's nothing you can do to bring him back."

This seemed like good advice and Mildred was a sensible girl. She had no children, but she did have the house and a small income. Within a year she was doing nicely, fairly happy, and reasonably busy, but there was something missing, and Mildred didn't realise quite what it was until she looked at Jeffrey that day and saw the perspiration running down that broad and muscled chest.

At first she was shocked at herself. Mildred Remish, she thought, whatever are you thinking about?

" This is super lemonade, Mrs. Remish," said Jeffrey.

" Have another glass, Jeffrey," said Mildred.

" That's very kind of you," Jeffrey said, as he held out the glass in his strong but strangely sensitive hand.

" I'll bet you don't get much homemade lemonade at college, do you?" said Mildred.

" Not any, in fact," Jeffrey said, " or any home cooking at all."

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"That seems a shame," said Mildred, "a young man like you needs good food to get through all those thick books they make you read."

"Perhaps that's my trouble," Jeffrey said. "Do you think a good pot roast might get me through my Hindu?"

Mildred laughed. "I don't know about Hindu, but why not give it a try. I've got a pot roast in the oven at this very moment. If you don't help me eat it, I'll be having pot roast sandwiches for months."

"That's the most irresistible invitation I've had in weeks, Mrs. Remish," Jeffrey said. "If you can keep it hot while I go back and have a bath and change, why I'll guarantee you'll be lucky to have enough left for one sandwich."

"No need to go all the way back to change," Mildred heard herself say.

"I can't eat like this," Jeffrey said.

"I mean you can have a bath here," explained Mildred. "You can wear my husband's old dressing-gown while I rinse out your clothes. I'll pop them in the dryer and they'll be ready in a jiffy."

Jeffrey protested, "I hate to put you to all that trouble, Mrs. Remish."

"Just call me Mildred," said Mildred.

"Mildred," Jeffrey repeated.

"You go ahead and have your bath. It's right through the bedroom there. I'll go and get the dressing-gown," Mildred shouted over her shoulder, as she headed for the attic.

It took a bit of doing to find that old dressing-gown. She had put it away eight years ago and hadn't given it a thought since then, but she finally found it in the trunk with her wedding dress. She took it out and started to close the trunk, then she paused, took out her wedding dress, and held it up to herself and looked in an old mirror nearby. It was a pretty dress and every bride is beautiful.

Suddenly, Mildred rolled back the years and felt beautiful again, and, indeed, she was beautiful, in a way reserved for a forty-five year old woman who enjoys being a woman.

By the time she got downstairs, Jeffrey was already out of the bathroom with a scant towel wrapped round his waist. He was taken aback when Mildred burst in with the dressing-gown. Mildred, who had had no reason not to burst into her bedroom for so long, suddenly found herself standing beside Jeffrey holding Henry's gown. She could feel her cheeks flush red.

"I beg your pardon," she said, as she quickly turned to leave.

"No, don't go," she heard Jeffrey say, and she felt his hand

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softly touch hers. He slowly turned her round and willingly, happily, and contentedly, she let herself be drawn into his embrace . . .

They had very little in common except for lovemaking, but that seemed to be more than enough, and on this firm foundation the agreement evolved.

Jeffrey moved in. He lived rent free, although to the outside world Mrs. Remish had taken in a boarder—" that nice young man from college." In return, he mowed the lawn, did odd jobs, and slept with Mildred on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These days worked out best because Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights, Jeffrey taught at evening classes, and at weekends he often went to visit his Aunt Helen who had brought him up after he lost his parents.

Jeffrey never complained about his Tuesday and Thursday duties. He rather looked forward to it because Mildred, while hardly intellectually appealing, made love with a certain childlike abandon that was rather charming. He gave himself credit for this response. However, this was an honour he did not completely deserve, because even though Jeffrey was very handsome, Mildred was a great movie fan and in the darkness and in the warmth of Jeffrey's embrace, she wandered into wonderful flights of fancy. One Tuesday, Jeffrey would become Gregory Peck, one Thursday Cary Grant, and for several Tuesdays and Thursdays he would be Rudolph Valentino, Mildred's special favourite.

This somehow gave Mildred a wild vicarious fulfilment that was immensely satisfying. For had Jeffrey been her husband, she would have felt terribly disloyal putting him out of her mind and substituting someone else; but Jeffrey was just a handsome young man, and her mind merely needed to imagine his nose a bit longer, his chin a bit firmer, and suddenly her favourite star was making love to her.

For three years this worked to everyone's satisfaction and contentment, until one Tuesday night Jeffrey mentioned that next June he would send in his thesis and, if it was accepted, he would get his doctorate. Mildred allowed that that was nice.

Then Jeffrey said, " It means I'll have to look for a teaching job."

Mildred said, " Oh! "

That night, suddenly she found herself not in the arms of Cary Grant, or Gregory Peck, but in the embrace of Jeffrey Fenshaw, and she held him as close as she could, and never again on Tuesday or Thursday did her mind tamper with his handsome features. She counted the Tuesdays and Thursdays

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left for her. It was September, and at best there were only thirty-four left, and as she crossed them off in her mind, they became more and more precious . . .

The unexpected flaw in her arithmetic came in March, in the shape of a five-foot-four blonde named Betty Mason. Betty was working for her finals in Industrial Psychology. She was a pretty young thing with all the bounce and blush of a wonderfully normal, happily feminine young lady. Mildred even liked Betty, despite pangs of envy and jealousy.

Jeffrey stopped going home to see his Aunt Helen as frequently as he used to; and when he did go he took Betty along. This alarmed Mildred, but then weekends never were part of the deal.

Everything would have worked out reasonably well had it not been for that first Tuesday in May. There were only twelve Tuesdays and Thursdays left, and Jeffrey had been faithful to his unwritten agreement, but on this particular Tuesday, he phoned Mildred and said he couldn't get back for dinner because he had to work on his thesis.

Mildred reassured him. " I'll keep a plate in the oven. It's your favourite, pot roast."

Jeffrey replied, " You'd better not. I'll be very late. Don't wait up for me. I'll see you at breakfast."

Mildred was upset but cheered herself with the hope that Jeffrey might let his Friday class go early. He had done that once before on her birthday. It was sort of a surprise present.

Mildred went to bed on this optimistic note.

It must have been around two o'clock that she heard the noise on the stairs. She almost called out, but decided to listen instead.

She heard Jeffrey whisper, " Take off your shoes; she's asleep."

Then she heard Betty. " I feel like a burglar."

Jeffrey cautioned, " Shh! Don't wake her up or I'm in trouble."

Mildred lay awake until the creaky stairs complained again two hours later. The front door opened and she heard Jeffrey whisper, " I love you, Betty."

Betty answered, " Oh, darling, I love you."

The door quietly closed, and Jeffrey creaked his way quietly up the stairs to bed.

Mrs. Livingston said it was about five o'clock, just before dawn, that she heard something that sounded like a shot or a backfire. She woke her husband but he told her to go to sleep.

Mildred called the police around eight o'clock. She never said a word in her defence at the trial, and the only thing she would say to the lawyer the court assigned to defend her was, " Tuesday night was mine."

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THE ANTAGONISTS

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BEGINNING . . .

a brilliant thriller of a new kind by

William Haggard

Author of Venetian Blind, The Arena, The Telemann Touch, The High Wire

THE Ilyushin was half an hour late already, and the pilot had come back to tell Gorjan that now there would be more delay: he wasn't pleased. It was a scheduled flight, but he was Alexander Gorjan, and a compartment had been screened off for him—four first-class seats. In a matter of an hour or so he would be giving a formal lecture to the Imperial Circle of Scientists in London.

He hadn't wanted to come, but the President had insisted. The Andover Lecture at the Imperial Circle was a world occasion in the world of science; it had enormous prestige and his country could do with it. The President of the Confederate Republic had almost pleaded, and that wasn't something he did often. He knew Gorjan hadn't been well of late but he would send a doctor with him. Alex Gorjan had declined the doctor.

Now he was wishing he hadn't. His head ached intolerably, forehead and neck too.

No, he shouldn't have come. He'd been working too hard, but he was too much a realist to blame the fact. Men didn't have breakdowns through overwork alone, or his sort of man didn't. But they might if they burnt it both ends, they might if they mixed

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their drinks, made love to too many women. He was fond of drink, he always had been, and Sonia in particular had been intolerably beautiful. His smile was small but it wasn't dissatisfied. Sonia would remember him.

He put out his hand and pulled the curtain. Outside the porthole was a cottonwool sea of cloud: somewhere below was England. He hadn't seen it for fifteen years. He had enjoyed his time at Cambridge; he had even liked the English. Undeniably Cambridge had been hospitable. It would be strange to see it again after this ridiculous meeting had been dealt with. He had a full week's programme and naturally Cambridge was on it. So for that matter was a place called Oxford. A good Cambridge man, he'd heard of Oxford.

Meanwhile he had to talk to them, these ancient prestigious hasbeens. The Circle wasn't science but the graveyard of old scientists. He'd give them a show, though. His English was pretty good still, and he'd been rubbing it up. For Alexander Gorjan that hadn't been difficult. In the Confederate Republic a wish to rub your English up could sometimes bring the police on you with awkward questions about your intentions. But not on Gorjan. He wasn't an apolitical scientist: on the contrary he was a communist and proud of it. He'd prepared his speech in writing but nobody had asked to see the script. He had unrivalled knowledge in his specialist line and soon he might have something more, but nobody had even hinted that in England he should guard it. He was a good party man in excellent standing. Privately he put his country first. That too was acceptable in the Confederate Republic.

He rose to his feet suddenly as his head split in two, gripping the table in front of him, grimacing. When the spasm was over, he sat down shakily. The pilot had come back again, looking at him uneasily. "Landing in five minutes, sir."

Alexander Gorjan walked down the gangway, a hand on the rail to steady him. He was surprised to find it was dark. He had known they were late but not how badly. The photographers held up cameras and the flashlights nearly blinded him. When he had his sight back he could make out a knot of men. One of them detached himself, shaking hands quickly. "I'm Jensen," he said, "Professor Jensen. We've arranged to waive all formalities. There's a car by the runway and your luggage can follow." Jensen looked at his watch. "We'll just about make it." The ambassador of the Confederate Republic came towards Gorjan, and another man Gorjan recognised as Stevan Stare, their First Secretary. The car slid up to them . . .

As they approached Burlington House the ambassador gently nudged the grey-faced, sleeping Gorjan; his head came up, he gave a stifled groan.

"We're here."

They walked through the portico, and up the ugly imposing

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" A sort of uncle to the cloak and dagger boys," is how William Haggard describes his duties as senior staff officer in Delhi during the war. He came to them via Oxford, the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Army.

When he returned to the ordered, law-abiding life of a Higher Civil Servant in Whitehall, he brought with him a dazzling treasure chest of potential plots. Intrigue, violence, smouldering passions and political chicanery—he knew them all. Powerful ingredients potently mixed, they sent him rocketing to the top of his particular tree and America, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Holland, and Japan have shared the impact. Whitehall alone, remains unmoved. The Antagonists, running richly to form, features again his distinguished intelligence chief, the brilliant, inscrutable Charles Russell, head of the Security Executive.

staircase. For a moment Gorjan rallied. He said, turning to the ambassador, " Talking first, I believe. Dinner afterwards."

" That's the arrangement." His Excellency was pleased with it. Formal talk after dinner he considered uncivilised.

They walked into a long cold room. There were two empty seats, and as Gorjan and the ambassador took them there was a burst of clapping. The chairman said with a splendid brevity, " You all know our guest. His achievements speak better than I do. Your Royal Highness. Your Grace. My lords, ladies, and gentlemen." The chairman raised an arm, an actor's gesture. " Dr. Alexander Gorjan."

There was another burst of clapping, then silence as Gorjan rose. He was feeling a little better now. The typescript of his lecture was in his pocket, but one shouldn't read a lecture unless obliged to. It wasn't polite. He opened his mouth. " Ladies and gentlemen—" He swallowed his words, astounded.

In the third row of crazy chairs an old, old man had risen. He had a lined simian face and thin white hair. And he was talking, " The appalling crisis in which humanity now finds itself . . ."

Gorjan sat down uncertainly. The introduction had seemed clear enough, but here was this old monkey nattering . . .

The man beside Gorjan pulled at his sleeve. " It's Merridew," he explained. " Sir William Merridew. The Grand Old Man . . ."

" But what's he talking about? "

" The bomb."

" The bomb! I'm not an atomic physicist! "

Alex Gorjan was bitterly insulted. He put his hand to his forehead. In a minute or less the pain would be unbearable.

The chairman had risen again. " Sir William's views," he was saying smoothly, " are well known to all of us." He bowed at Sir William Merridew. " But on this of all occasions—"

" I will not be silenced." The Polonius voice, a senile treble,

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ran up the scale alarmingly, cracked at the top. " The future of humanity is in our hands, nay—"

Alex Gorjan had risen too. He was in dreadful pain again. He fingered his neck, feeling it where it joined his spine. His head was on his body still: it didn't seem so. He drew a deliberate breath. He had a fine deep chest and a fine deep voice came out of it. " Silly old bastard. Ignorant clown."

There was an appalled and appalling silence. The chairman got to, " Gentlemen," but Gorjan pushed him firmly down. He steadied himself with his other hand. The agony was purple now, then red. Through it his voice rang savagely, " Fascist. Imperialist. Impotent aged pig."

" Gentlemen, gentlemen, I beg you, I—"

Alexander Gorjan was suddenly terrified. He couldn't see, he was going blind. Sir William Merridew had disappeared, then he was back again, enormous, looming. Gorjan felt on the table, his hands moving urgently. There'd been water in a heavy glass carafe. His hands found it blindly, for his eyes were still on Merridew. He hadn't dared move them. He pulled back his arm; for an instant Merridew was huge again. He threw and Sir William fell.

There was immediate pandemonium. Somebody was wiping blood from Sir William Merridew's face. Gorjan didn't see it. He was lying across the table; he was out.

A little earlier, Colonel Charles Russell had been walking home from his cosily untidy room in the Security Executive. His day hadn't been more worrying than usual, and in any case he handled worry well. He walked across St. James's Park, sixty but erect still, casually elegant, glancing at the evening paper as he went.

Charles Russell knew about Gorjan. It wasn't formally his business to watch the safety of very important visitors, but he would have agreed that one of the charms of work in the Security Executive was that its responsibilities were never defined precisely. The safety of Alexander Gorjan was the responsibility of the Special Branch, and Russell had a high opinion of its competence. That hadn't prevented his slipping a man of his own into Gorjan's entourage.

He strode on briskly, thinking about Gorjan. Alexander Gorjan was a radar man, which in the context of contemporary anarchy meant an early-warning man, and a scientist with an edge in early warning was at least as important as another with a bigger bomb or better rocket. In conditions of nuclear stalemate, he could even be his master. But it wasn't only Gorjan's professional reputation which was interesting. Gorjan was a man, an authentic individual.

Which, Russell reflected, had been one of his reasons for adding to the precautions which the Special Branch would certainly have taken. Gorjan couldn't be relied on to follow a schedule which bored him. He had the civilised man's contempt for cocktails but an equal eye for a pretty woman. When he saw one, if she liked

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him, he would take her on to dinner. To wherever she chose. The lady might not care a damn: the Special Branch shadow would. Charles Russell's smile broadened. Gorjan was one to play by ear, so that was the way he'd play it.

He let himself into his unpretentious flat, and turned on the telly. There was a spy serial which he was watching avidly. He settled with a drink . . .

When the telephone rang peremptorily, Russell looked at his desk. Two instruments stood on it and their notes were a little different. This was the one without a dial. Russell rose resignedly, flicking off the telly. He picked up the receiver.

" Colonel Charles Russell? It's Copeman here, sir."

" Good evening, Copeman."

" I hope you're going to think so, sir. I'm speaking from the Imperial Circle. There's been a—well, a—"

" Tell me."

The voice on the telephone began to talk quickly. When it had finished Charles Russell said, " And afterwards? "

" They handled it pretty slickly. Merridew wasn't seriously hurt. Gorjan was unconscious, but his own people looked after him—his ambassador and another man called Starc. They had an ambulance there in no time. It took him to the Hemmingway Hospital, near Egham."

" And who was with the ambulance? "

" Male nurse or maybe houseman. Driver. Attendant."

" Recognise any of them? As friends of ours, I mean."

" They were strangers to me."

" Did anyone else board the ambulance? "

" Not that I saw. If you're thinking of our Special Branch colleagues, there was one in the audience. Him I did recognise. And the usual sort of car would have been calling for Gorjan after dinner. That hadn't arrived by then. There was no dinner."

" But our friend in the audience didn't go near the ambulance? "

" No. I expect he was telephoning—reporting for fresh orders. I'd have done that first myself, if I'd had the same masters."

" I shouldn't be surprised." Charles Russell's voice was dry. He thought again. " So our colleagues don't yet know that it's the Hemmingway Hospital? "

" I wouldn't say that, sir. The man we're talking about didn't come near the ambulance, but the attendant made no secret where they were taking Gorjan. A dozen people could have heard him, and for that sort of nervous breakdown Hemmingway's an obvious bet. In any case, a little quick work on the telephone—"

" You think our friends will be right behind that ambulance? "

" Maybe not *right* behind. I give them half an hour."

" Which I won't give anyone. Get over to this Hemmingway at once. Pick up another man if you can."

" I can."

" Then do."

Russell returned to the telly. Somebody was creeping up on

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someone else, trying to get a shot at him. Charles Russell frowned. That happened in real life too.

The full style and title of the Hemmingway Hospital was the Hemmingway Hospital for Nervous and Psychiatric Disorders. The word disorders had given the Ministry of Health a month of delicious indecision: diseases versus disorders—it was the sort of thing which an official was happy to minute about indefinitely, and the file had been a good inch thick.

It was a remarkable building, or rather a collection of remarkable buildings. Its heart was a late Victorian mansion in considerable grounds which were now extremely valuable. To this Betjeman's Delight had been added wings in the glass and concrete manner of a City development. Sensitives shuddered, and the establishment cost the taxpayer an annual fortune. There were two opinions whether it was worth it. Psychiatrists, whom it employed extravagantly, were understandably enthusiastic, but family doctors in solid practices had discreet reservations.

To this monument to a pseudo-science the ambulance had taken Alexander Gorjan, and for an instant in the small hours he had recovered consciousness. He looked round the little room, trying to focus it. Instinct told him he was in a hospital, but the room was more luxurious than any hospital he'd known. He wasn't in pain and he found he could think. A little and loosely, but he could think. He couldn't remember. Clearly they'd drugged him, and a good thing too. He'd been right at his limit and he must have gone over it. Otherwise, why the hospital? This had happened to him before and he'd always lived. And this seemed a good sort of hospital. There was a nurse on duty, standing by the window, and she had just pulled a curtain back, peeping out from behind it. The curtain was white, but the nurse was black.

For an instant his terror returned. Not long ago—he couldn't remember—he had thought he was going blind: now his eyes were again betraying him. He shut them a moment, mastering his fear, then he looked at the nurse again . . . But of course she was black—negresses were. He'd heard there were thousands in England. Where of course they'd do the dirty work, of course they'd be exploited. He'd been reading about the scandal in the Confederacy's newspapers. Capitalist exploitation. Not that this nurse looked notably exploited. She was a buxom creature, obviously well fed. The girl was really handsome—black but comely. Now where had that bubbled up from? Some book, he supposed, he'd read at Cambridge. He sighed as the drug bit again, and slept.

The nurse hadn't noticed that for a moment he had been conscious. She had been knitting quietly and had risen on an instinct which she wouldn't have admitted. Once, in another life, her mother had taken her out at midnight. They had driven in a jalopy, out of the town, the tarred roads fading into tracks, then into jungle . . . She had felt it then, long before the drums began,

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excitement and something more. The something more was danger.

The nurse peeped from the window. In the garden outside it was very dark. And that was all. She shivered but sat down again. She wasn't at ease still . . .

The grounds behind the Hemmingway, like the heart of the hospital, were laid out in the taste of the nineties. A belt of shrubs backed on to a wide gravel terrace. The wall of the house rose sheer from the gravel. Once there had been flowerbeds to divide the two, now there was only gravel.

Two men were lying in the shrubbery, talking quietly in a foreign tongue. One pointed at a light from a feyly gothic window. "You think he's in there?"

"There isn't another light. In any case, once we get in—"

"We can't play hide-and-seek round a dozen wards."

"This won't be a ward. The wards will be in the new part. This is for V.I.P.s."

"Or a resident staff?"

The other considered, then shrugged. "We haven't a better bet," he said. "What's more, there's that drainpipe. Three floors to go, though. Come."

They moved across the gravel silently, testing the drainpipe, beginning to climb expertly, and two more men in the shrubbery's shadow nodded approval. They waited till the climbers were halfway up, then they moved with an equal silence At the bottom of the drainpipe, Copeman spoke.

"Keep your hands on that pipe."

The climbers looked down at the two steady guns. One was on each of them.

"You at the top—throw your gun to me. Move only one hand and throw so I can catch it."

There was an instant's hesitation.

"You're monkeys on a stick, you know. You're sitters."

In the glow from the window, a pistol glinted suddenly. Copeman caught it neatly, glancing at it and shrugging. He put it in his pocket. "Now you at the bottom."

He caught the second pistol too. "Come down, please—gently, gently."

They came down gently, gently, standing against the wall. They faced the guns silently.

"Now do as you're told. You're coming with us."

One of the men against the wall said something to the other. Copeman didn't understand him but he caught the tone.

"I wouldn't try anything foolish like a break for it. We've only to wing you and you won't get up."

The taller of the two against the wall spoke first. "And where are you taking us?"

"You'll soon find out."

Colonel Charles Russell was reading a report on the events the night before at the Hemmingway Hospital It was an interim

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report, but as far as it went he found it satisfactory. The two men concerned spoke adequate English but their native tongue was the language of the Confederate Republic. So far they hadn't used either much; they hadn't come near to breaking. But they had been identified. Ostensibly they were refugees from the Confederacy and they had entered the country about a month ago both secretly and illegally. When they had immediately disappeared in London. Interrogation was proceeding since it was perfectly safe to hold them.

Russell nodded approvingly. He decided that he wouldn't tell the Minister, or not just yet. He hadn't a pattern which fitted, and a couple of incidents, very probably connected but lacking a firm connection, wasn't something to offer a busy Minister. Mr. Gabriel Palliser would already know about the evening fracas at the Imperial Circle—know and be unwelcomely involved. Mutual apologies would already be flying between the Circle and Gorjan's embassy, but there would be more to the exchanges than polite apologies. If Gorjan was as ill as he seemed to be he might be in hospital for weeks, and that could be more than awkward. The Confederate Republic wouldn't like it; they'd be suspicious at best; they'd want him safely back, and quick. Their ambassador would be telephoning, amongst others to Palliser. Who had enough on his plate already. Russell smiled urbanely. Their ambassador *had* been telephoning—to him, Charles Russell. They were very old friends.

He looked at his clock. His appointment with His Excellency was for a quarter past ten and he had a quarter of an hour to wait still. He walked to a safe, unlocked it, taking out Gorjan's dossier. He began to read steadily.

A man, he thought, a genuine male animal. They weren't so common. Alexander Gorjan was a communist, but Russell mistrusted political labels. Russell had been dropped in the war as British Liaison Officer into what was later to become the Confederate Republic and had spent three fruitful months there. He'd loathed the country but liked the people. Clearly Gorjan had their virtues. He was a scientist of world stature, so he must be outstandingly intelligent, and most of his compatriots were hardly that. But he hadn't allowed it to set him apart. He worked and he worked—but he also found time to live. Dr. Gorjan liked slim fast cars; he liked wine and the best of food; and above all he liked women, lots of women. Charles Russell smiled again. This wasn't the picture of a scientist's traditional austerity. And all the time Gorjan worked. Between the meals, the excellent local Riesling, the troops and parades of strapping girls, he worked. Now he'd worked himself into the Hemmingway Hospital.

The intercom purred discreetly and Russell pressed the switch.

"The ambassador to see you by appointment, sir."

"Have him shown up, please."

Nikola Mitrovic walked in. He walked firmly but lightly still, unmistakably a southern Slav. He had the peasant's solid figure

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and a large moustache. Russell noticed that it wasn't quite as big as once it had been—Excellencies must eschew extremes—but it was still a splendid growth. He was middle-aged now and maybe more, but he didn't invite a liberty. Russell had never intended one.

His Excellency said pleasantly, " We don't see as much of each other as we used to."

" That must be remedied."

" They were good in their ways, those days. The fighting—"

" I didn't do much fighting."

" You do yourself less than justice. Your job was to give us arms and of course to advise us."

" I never liked your enemies."

On an inflection of inquiry Mitrovic said, " We can talk on that basis? "

" Frankly, I expected to."

" Good. Then you'll have heard about Alexander Gorjan."

" The affair at the Circle last night? I've read the papers."

" Not only that. We sent him here, you know."

" I know he could hardly have come here without your President's approval."

" He had very much more than that. We *sent* him. You take what I'm trying to say? "

" I'm not sure I do."

His Excellency played with his fine moustache. " Then I'll have to explain, though I suspect you already know much of it. You know enough about my country to be certain that we're communists, but there are more sorts of Marxist than one. There are Leninists and Stalinites, or rather there were, there are Trotskyites, the Chinese, back-to-the-book boys, deviationists—"

" I'm not a theologian."

" Touché." Nikola Mitrovic laughed. " Let's leave it that we're nationalists—we always were. That may be within the orthodox canon though more probably it isn't: the fact remains that a genuinely independent Confederate Republic has never really suited a much more powerful neighbour. The scales go up and down, of course, there are comings and goings to Moscow, but basically it's a matter of power politics. None of us believes that if we weakened we could stand."

" And nor do I."

" I'm glad. But the word you have to listen to is ' us.' We, the old ones—the President, myself, the men you lay in ditches with. But you can never be sure about the younger generation. I was reminding you that there was more than one sort of communism, and one of our men in fifty, say, embraces a different kind. Mostly they're the younger ones. You were talking about theology and I'll gladly steal your metaphor. The really religious man puts his creed above all else. Even before his country." Mitrovic wasn't laughing now. " Naturally he gets *used*. There's a conflict you see, and there always has been. I think there always will be. We're not cut out for Satellite status."

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" I'd hate to try to rule you."

" Quite. Making bad subjects is our major strength, but there's always been a neighbour anxious to, well, control us. Sometimes when the two of us are snarling we're snarling at nothing and know it, and sometimes when we're shaking hands we're really pretty desperate." Mitrovic straightened suddenly. " That happened last week and it was touch and go. Not a direct invasion —but a snatch at power internally. It isn't impossible, it never is. Not even here. The Army is sound enough, but you know where we have to keep it. By the time it got back to the capital everything could be over—help asked for and given—the usual takeover technique. It's happened in other states, it's always irreversible." Mitrovic hesitated, then said firmly, " We *had* to get Gorjan *out*."

" He's really as big as that? "

" To us he is. You know what his line is—radar. And radar means interception." The heavy shoulders rose and fell. " Not that I believe he could get on to anything which Russian resources couldn't develop too, but he might get there first."

" I see. And you think he has? "

" I'm not a scientist. I said I thought he might. And if I think so, so could our neighbours."

" Tricky," Charles Russell said.

" For us, very tricky." His Excellency rose, walking to the wall. Staring at a mezzotint, his broad back still to Russell, Mitrovic said softly, " I've come to ask a favour."

" Yes? "

" I said there was a crisis and there is. Normally they last a week and then we know where we are." Mitrovic swung suddenly. " But not this time," he said.

" The pot's still boiling? I didn't know that."

Russell waved at the empty chair and Mitrovic sat down again. " And this favour you were asking me? "

" Keep Gorjan here a bit. Of course, we could simply tell him to stay but it would look decidedly suspicious having a perfectly healthy Gorjan hanging about in England doing nothing. Your papers would smell a rat at once and I told you we liked to keep our troubles to ourselves."

Russell asked blandly, " You mean we should find a job for him? "

" You know he wouldn't work for you. You couldn't permit it and he wouldn't want to. *I just want him kept here.*"

Charles Russell shook his head. " It isn't on. Why should we hold your hot potato? In any case I don't think it's really necessary. Gorjan seems pretty ill. You're a fine healthy man yourself and I doubt if you know much about psychiatrists. The reputation of the Hemmingway Hospital is that it's easy enough to get into but a whole lot harder to get out. I don't think it's likely that they'll bundle Gorjan on to an aircraft for your country simply because he's recovered enough to stand the journey."

" You find him a hot potato, then? "

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" I do." Russell had taken an immediate decision; he wouldn't play ball with a half-baked idea, but he'd pass information. Mitrovic, indeed, had a right to this special piece of it. Russell said evenly, watching Mitrovic, " Did you know there was an attempt on Gorjan's life last night? "

The ambassador sat motionless. His eyes had narrowed in an expression Russell recognised. He looked solider than ever—dangerous. This wasn't an Excellency but again a fighting man. He began to bark briefly, " You've got the men? "

" We have."

" How many men, please? "

" Two."

" Nationality? "

" Yours. There's a near-colony of your people here and on the face of it they're runaways from your own brand of communism. But we've known for some time that several were more than that. These two were new arrivals, so we now want their contacts."

Nikola Mitrovic went silent. This was more serious than he had known. He had known that he had enemies in London but not that they were organised. Gorjan had collapsed and had been taken to the Hemmingway. Which couldn't have been foreseen.

Yet within hours they had moved against him. So either an unexpected opportunity had been acted on very quickly, or else an existing plan had been switched with a frightening competence. Russell had taken the men concerned; even in England they always broke in time, and they'd implicate those who worked with them. When Russell would act. It was no part of his duty to support the Republic against its enemies, but it was very much his business to prevent those enemies mounting a murder in England. The political complications could be incalculable, and the English detested the incalculable. Mitrovic knew his Russell.

He looked up at him quickly but his face told him nothing. Mitrovic sighed softly. Russell would deal with these refugees; he'd find English ways to block them; he'd deal with the body, but the brains, the ambassador thought, what seemed to be the leader . . .

He would have given a great deal to be able to tell Russell about Stevan Starc. Starc was his own First Secretary, but Mitrovic had just received a tip-off. It hadn't astonished him that there was an agent in his embassy. (There was already a safe which he couldn't open without the help of quite a junior member of his staff, and he was aware that his personal servant, Petar, held the rank of major in an organisation which certainly wasn't the diplomatic corps.) What had astonished him—frightened him too—was to discover that the agent wasn't his own. There had been an immediate exchange of telegrams in a code used only in emergencies, and very much the answer which Mitrovic had expected. Starc had been screened from birth and there was nothing against him. But His Excellency's telegram hadn't been pooh-poohed. Starc's record was impeccable but he could always have defected.

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In Eastern Europe *defector* was the worst word known. Defection to the West was bad, but one which looked eastwards to the final enemy a great deal worse. Stevan Starc was a traitor.

Another telegram had followed and with it, decision. This was too serious to be solved by a recall. A simple recall might simply be disobeyed, and if Starc went underground in London an important lead would go with him. A specialist would be dispatched as soon as he could be relieved of his present assignment. Rank in embassy to be Third Secretary. But he'd have to be briefed and accredited and it would all take some time. Meanwhile there was Petar.

Nikola Mitrovic sighed again. Petar was his servant and an experienced man, but he wasn't a young one. What was now needed was some tough young operator, somebody who could shadow Starc, a resourceful man, ruthless if required, and . . .

And Russell would have a dozen such. His Excellency would have given his pension to be able to tell Russell about Starc.

He rose a little heavily and left.

Starc was walking to the Bear and Staff after the worst day he could remember. There had been nothing from his two best men and he realised what that meant. Moreover the failure was wholly his, since it had been his own decision to send them to the Hemmingway. There hadn't been time for consultation.

He had heard the attendant of the ambulance talking about the Hemmingway Hospital and it had seemed an opportunity which they couldn't afford to miss. They had always assumed that Gorjan would be guarded and would stay so throughout his visit. Their original plan had allowed for that but, like all plans to kill a guarded man, it wouldn't have been infallible. Now their carefully considered plan had gone, but that could cut both ways. This might be opportunity, wide open. A sudden change of schedule to a hospital in a suburb . . .

Starc had risked a telephone, telling his men that the existing plan was cancelled. Now he was wishing he hadn't. Failure wasn't something his masters accepted easily, and the only two men he thought of as proper agents hadn't reported. Starc indeed knew what that meant. Sooner or later they'd admit his connection with them, but he'd face that when he came to it. Meanwhile the small fry knew him only as a number which sent them orders. He owed them a warning and he owed himself time to think. So he was walking to the Bear and Staff with the message to his contacts of every agent under pressure. Disperse. If caught, keep your mouth shut.

He went the way he always did, walking across Paddington Street and turning into Ashland Place. Ashland, he supposed, was some English landlord's name but " Place " was pretentious. The lane was eight feet wide at most. The wall of the old cemetery was on Starc's right, three feet of brickwork topped by chain fencing, and, on his left, the almost unbroken backs of what he had learnt were Buildings. They were working-class flats. Their doors were

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in another street, but the windows of the living-rooms, low against the pavement, looked into Ashland Place. They were heavily curtained, and Starc had always thought them very cosy. There were warm lights behind them and the chatter of television. Stevan Starc smiled. Behind him was the comparative bustle of Paddington Street, here he was in another world, almost another century.

He had been thinking about his errand, and for the first time he noticed that he was walking in the dark. Normally the little lane was lighted by four lamps spaced one at each end and two in the middle, riding high on the Buildings' wall, electric now but elegant old things still. Tonight they weren't working. There was the faintest glow from behind the snug curtained windows; a stripling moon chased cumulus across the sky. And that was all—that and the old cemetery.

He felt in his pocket for a torch, stopping to do so, and twenty yards behind him a man stopped too.

Starc froze against the wall. He knew at once that someone was shadowing him, and he weighed the chances coolly. He considered the window behind him but dismissed it. It was too solid to crash, and if he knocked they would be frightened. Even if they opened there would be explanations, talk, and Stevan Starc detested explanations.

He looked at the wire on the cemetery wall. He could make it perhaps, but it wasn't a working risk. Caught halfway over, a man would be quite defenceless. He looked down Ashland Place to Moxon Street. He could run for it—so could the other. Besides if he ran he'd never know. Cosh man or something else . . .

The difference was important.

Deliberately Starc walked back to the other man. He didn't move. Starc wasn't armed but that didn't worry him. He had switched off his torch but now he turned it on again. He flashed it in the other's face.

Quite suddenly he was furious. Petar! They'd put Mitrovic's servant, Petar, on his tail. Petar was a petty spy: this was an insult.

Without speaking, Starc seized his shoulders. He shook him like a doormat, silent and savage. Petar twisted in his grip, but helplessly. Starc threw him against the wall and his head smashed against it. Petar staggered but did not fall.

Methodically Starc began to beat him. He hit him once in the face and twice in the stomach. Petar groaned softly and began to fold. Starc took his collar, pulling him upright. He raised his free hand and the knife came up at him. It was shatteringly unexpected and a bare inch off target. Starc felt blood on his cheek but below the eye. He caught the knife and put it in his pocket. Petar didn't resist him now. Starc smashed him down again, then, with a quiet brutality, kicked him insensible. Petar didn't utter.

When it was done Starc searched him quickly, looking each way

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up Ashland Place, ready to run. He took Petar's wallet, his watch, and a thin gold pencil. Then he straightened again, pulling up his scarf above his nose. There was fog and it wouldn't look unusual. There was blood inside his collar now and there seemed to be a lot of it. He couldn't patch this one up himself, he'd have to get attention. He slipped back to Paddington Street, looking both ways, and in the High Street he found a taxi. He gave it an address in Gilston Road. A Dr. Palfrey lived there though she didn't now practise. Margaret Palfrey called herself a literary journalist and broadcaster.

A procession of lovers had found a shorter word. Starc had been one of them. If, he thought grimly, "lover" wasn't an indecency. Only the tightest discipline had kept him within a mile of her.

In the taxi he sat rigid. The blood had come down to his chest now, tickling him surprisingly, warm and disgusting. It was worse than he'd thought; it would be five or six stitches at least. He adjusted the scarf, reversing it to hide the blood.

He paid the taxi quickly, using his own key. Margaret Palfrey was writing in the living-room. He'd always hated it. There were African woodcarvings on the mantelpiece, avant garde paintings, and elaborate flowers which could have done with changing. This was Margaret Palfrey's room and it became her. Starc took off his scarf and waited.

She ran to him with a little cry. "Why, Stevan . . ."

He could have killed her with greater pleasure than he had beaten Petar. He'd known she'd give a little cry, he'd known she'd say, "Why, Stevan." And now she went on stupidly, "What's happened?"

He didn't answer. "Do you remember enough to stitch me up?"

"I—I really don't know. I've a box still, I think, but it's fifteen years. I—"

He watched her fuss with water and a towel. She was astonishingly clumsy with her hands. Perhaps that was why she had never really practised. He watched her fumbling, overpouring the disinfectant, almost upsetting the bowl. She was going to hurt him badly but he was good at pain. She swabbed off the blood and threaded a surgical needle.

"I'm afraid this is going to hurt . . ."

"Of course it is. Stop talking. Get it over."

She sewed him up roughly, apologising ceaselessly. He needed her, her almost forgotten skill. He thought of his need and not his loathing . . . Having to go to bed with her, the avid shameless thing, the far Left conversation first, the baby-talk after. Not that she was quite ugly yet, simply horrible and degrading.

And a duty he'd been assigned to, one almost of routine. For Margaret was of the high rich Left, the world of strident progressive thinkers.

Starc held it in a grim contempt, but it was something which no

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communist neglected, a richly stinking compost of petty treason. What swine they were! Talking progressive politics on comfortable incomes, cutting competitive figures in a cardboard world. They'd never face reality—they needn't. They'd talk and they'd fellow-travel, but they'd never know the passion. How indeed could they? Two hundred pounds a month of easy money. Often more. Of course they could never be taught or trained; no serious communist considered trying. But he'd recognise their usefulness.

Starc stared at Margaret Palfrey, hating her. She was looking for the scissors and it took her a minute to find them.

"I ought to put a bandage on."

"No. Give me some plaster."

She found it at last and the fumbling began again. He took it from her, cutting it neatly. The adhesive was almost gone, but he warmed it by the fire.

With the first hint of firmness Margaret Palfrey said, "And now we'll have a drink."

"No, thank you."

He saw he had astonished her. She'd been expecting his story and a cosy chat; even, he thought disgustedly, a little of what passed for love. He picked up his hat and overcoat: the scarf he held out to her. "Burn that."

"But, Stevan—"

"Burn it. And tell nobody I've been here, far less what for." He faced her implacably. "I'm quite sure you'll keep your mouth shut. I know who pays the rent, you see, and I know you don't want to lose him."

He watched her face disintegrate, but quite without pity. It had been one of the things he'd despised in her most—that she lived on a rich American. She'd laughed at him and often sneered, but she'd taken his money. Mellion Lee was sick with wealth and it came from his father's newspapers. He was a diplomat at their London embassy, a Counsellor. Stevan Starc would have smiled if his wound had let him. That at least had been compensation: secretly cuckolding an American dear colleague hadn't been distasteful. Mellion Lee would never know. They'd been very discreet indeed.

She began to cry but it didn't move him. Why, she couldn't even cry right. A woman should weep properly, decently discharging a decent grief. Margaret merely snivelled. He walked to the door and slammed it. Once in the street he spat.

He knew what he must do. Somebody had blown him—somebody had tipped off Mitrovic. It didn't much matter who. A blown agent was useless—worse, he was a danger. He must get underground and quick . . . Some time if he were lucky they would pull him out of England. Or more likely they wouldn't. He'd failed after all and that was fatal. There was a well-established method with Moscow agents who failed.

Stevan Starc knew the rules and he wasn't a coward.

He found another taxi, giving it this time an address in north London. It wasn't his hideout, long prepared, but only within a

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mile of it. In the wilderness north of Highbury that was a very long way.

There were standing orders to show Charles Russell any police report concerning diplomats or those who directly served them, and there was one on top of his pile next morning. Petar, the servant of the ambassador of the Confederate Republic, had been assaulted and robbed in Marylebone. With luck he'd recover consciousness, it wasn't certain he could identify his assailant.

The Security Executive didn't tail diplomats, even Iron Curtain diplomats, or not as a matter of course. Several it must; these it accepted as both normal duties and legitimate risks. Petar hadn't been one of them. Russell knew he was a spy but he considered him small beer. Moreover he'd cracked his network. From time to time Russell had even had titbits fed into it, checking on their disposal. So nobody had been on Petar's tail, but Petar didn't live in Marylebone or anywhere near it. Therefore he had probably had a contact there and Russell didn't know of one.

The implication was that there might have been a slip-up, so Russell had just telephoned to what the Security Executive called an area representative. They were field men in fact, and the local police, when sufficiently senior, were trusted with their identities but not much more.

In the postal district of London W.1, Russell had three of them. When the call came through he said, " Secure? "

" Secure, sir."

" Then there's been a report about a man called Petar. He didn't live in your manor but he was coshed and robbed in it. He was nominally the manservant of the ambassador of the Confederate Republic but he was also a minor spy. We know most things about him but not why he went to Marylebone. Had he anything there? "

" A contact, you mean? If he had, it was very new." The voice was confident.

" Any national of the Confederacy living in the area? "

" Only one. He's a diplomat called Starc, First Secretary at their embassy. He lives in Luxborough Street, the other end from Madame Tussaud's."

" But that's right on top of Ashland Place. Where Petar was coshed."

" I doubt if your man was visiting Starc, sir. Socially, they're in different worlds. Petar, you say, was a servant, and Stevan Starc, a First Secretary." There was a dry little chuckle. " No one is quite so protocol-conscious as a communist embassy. And meeting for business would have been absurdly insecure. Unnecessary, too—they could have seen each other daily at their jobs. I know one thing about Starc which interests me, and that I'm not sure of or I'd have sent it in already. He uses the Bear and Staff a lot, and I've sometimes wondered about the barmaid. She has very expensive jewellery and she has just bought a Mini. She

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could be a spy of sorts, most probably just a carrier, though there are earthier explanations of a barmaid's sudden wealth. I'm morally certain she wasn't carrying for Petar, and if Starc has been using her for purposes of his own, Petar still doesn't fit in."

"Hm . . . Ashland Place is remarkably close to Luxborough Street and I never feel quite happy with coincidence." Russell's voice changed decisively. "Sniff around it a bit and report again quickly."

He lit the first pipe of the day, thinking of Nikola Mitrovic. Russell had known more about the situation in the Confederate Republic than he had admitted to him. Dispatches from Her Majesty's ambassadors were notoriously misleading, but the Security Executive wasn't confined to official sources for its assessments of foreign countries. So Russell had at once accepted what Mitrovic had told him. "A snatch at power internally—" Nikola had used the phrase, and Russell hadn't discounted it. There was a crisis in the Confederacy, one which a neighbour would certainly exploit if indeed they hadn't started it . . .

Russell began on routine work, conscious that he was waiting on his telephone. Half an hour later it rang. A voice said cautiously, "West London One, north end. I think I'm going to surprise you, sir."

"I try never to be surprised."

"*I* was. I've done my sniffing and there's quite a smell." There was a well-timed pause. "Starc seems to have disappeared."

"You mean he's gone?" Russell's voice hadn't altered.

"Gone with the wind."

"Does anybody know it yet?"

"Only the porter at his block of flats. I'll come to the porter later, sir. I've had a look at Starc's flat. There's a service door to the block and that was easy. So was his own lock. There was nobody about. Bed hadn't been slept in and nothing had been disturbed. Wardrobe seemed full. No signs of packing. That was negative, of course."

"It was. So what did you do?"

"I got myself out again and rang the porter. Starc might have left a number. When it was clear he hadn't, I didn't actually say that I was ringing from his embassy, but I put on a foreign accent. I said I couldn't contact Monsieur Starc; I hinted he hadn't been quite as well as usual and I tried to sound worried. The porter asked me to hang on. I don't know what happened but I assume he went upstairs and used his pass key. When he came back *he* sounded worried.

"I thanked him and rang off. I imagine he'll give it an hour or two, then go to the police to cover himself."

"Saving us trouble."

"You don't want me to follow up?"

"Not yet. Missing persons are police work, or at any rate to start with. And the press will be on to this too. Diplomat Disappears from Luxury Flat." Russell was talking in headlines.

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"Why is it always a *luxury* flat? I'd rather the police dealt with that side. He's a diplomat too—that's tricky. So just for the moment lay off. And thank you. You've done very well."

Charles Russell sat back . . . So an ambassador's servant had been coshed and robbed. And quite a senior official of the same embassy, one living near the scene of the assault, had incontinently bolted. Behind all this, a very distinguished scientist from the country in question had been deliberately sent to England and within hours of his arrival had almost been murdered by men whose nationality was known. Which was the same as Petar's, the same as Starc's, the same, for that matter, as Gorjan's himself. Starc had been present at the Circle, and the crew of the ambulance hadn't concealed its destination. Therefore Starc could have passed it to the two would-be killers; indeed, if he hadn't, it was guesswork who had. Russell wouldn't know for certain till the two men started talking . . . The pieces fitted and the pattern they made was alarming. The sooner the Minister, Gabriel Palliser, knew about this, the happier Russell would be.

For a moment he hesitated. He had facts which fitted neatly but he hadn't a shred of proof. Not that its lack was fatal. Mr. Gabriel Palliser wasn't a civil servant. On the contrary, his mistrust of them was notorious and reciprocated.

It wasn't a story to tell a judge, but it was one to tell Gabriel Palliser. He telephoned to his office. Mr. Palliser had gone down to his constituency but he would be back in town tomorrow. Very well then, Colonel Russell would be sending him a report first thing in the morning. It would arrive by safehand messenger who would want the Minister's own signature for its delivery. Russell himself would be arriving for discussion half an hour behind this messenger. Say at ten o'clock . . . But half past ten would be more convenient? Then it was half past ten precisely . . .

Alexander Gorjan had woken from an afternoon asleep. He wasn't in pain, his eye was clear, and whatever drug they had been giving him had worked itself out of his system. This had happened before and he knew the symptoms. He was well again till next time.

He sat up in bed. "Give me a drink, please."

"I'll get you some tea."

"To hell with tea, I want some wine I know there'll be wine. My friends will have sent it."

The nurse was in a difficulty. She hadn't authority to give Gorjan wine, indeed she suspected it would be most irregular. On the other hand she couldn't afford a scene with him. Matron would be just as severe with her if a patient became excited as she would if he drank a glass of wine.

She went to the cupboard and opened a bottle. There was a label in the language she couldn't read, but it was wine all right. It was a straw-coloured thing, alive, and it smelt delicious. She brought a glass of it to the bed, but Gorjan didn't take it.

"But I can't drink alone."

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The nurse hesitated again. One thing she was certain of: she oughtn't to drink with patients, especially those who smiled at her. She was thinking he was a very good-looking man. He had a deep flat chest, and a lock of hair, shot faintly with a badger's grey, fell carelessly across an eye. The eye was blue and the voice was deep. The nurse said in a small one, " I—"

He smiled again and she caught her breath. " Come on—we're quite alone."

They were, she thought, at that. She poured another glass and brought it.

" That's better. Sit down. No, not on that chair. The bed."

" Oh no."

He showed white teeth again. " Don't be so haughty. It's a very good bed. How long have I been in it? "

" Two nights and a day. And what's gone of this one."

" It often takes longer when I've had one of these spasms. You've looked after me very well. You've earned your wine and somewhere comfortable to drink it." He patted the blanket. " Come on."

The nurse giggled but sat down. He pinched her bottom reflectively. He was thinking again how handsome she was. A fine full figure and a tiny waist. She was black as a sentry's boot but damned attractive. She knew it too—enjoyed it.

He drank his wine, not asking for more. One had to be sensible with the first drink for days, and sensible about the black nurse too. Later, no doubt—he could see it was mutual.

Mr. Gabriel Palliser was an excellent Minister and that was what counted. He knew his own job and respected you when you did. He didn't, for instance, ask questions he shouldn't; he hadn't distressed himself that the Security Executive was holding two foreigners in circumstances which would have outraged a court. Mr. Palliser wasn't a lawyer.

But he had read Russell's report and had grasped its implications instantly; he had been reasonable and even helpful . . .

The Minister had cocked a firm black eyebrow. How much did Starc matter now? He was formally still a diplomat, which was a dangerously explosive property often better left alone. And duly accredited diplomats couldn't expect to disappear without attracting attention, so Starc would know that the police at least would be something more than interested in his whereabouts. Also he would presumably read the papers still. He'd have to lie low—assuming, that is, that he hadn't already been spirited out of the country. Which seemed quite a big assumption. Palliser's own belief was that the bird had already flown. Frankly, his hope too.

Russell had nodded, rising to leave, but Palliser waved him down again. He offered his extravagant gold cigarette-case and when they were alight said quietly, " It looks fairly tidy, doesn't it? But I remember you once told me that nothing so much scared you as a case which looked open and shut "

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Charles Russell sat up sharply. "I believe you've a hunch. Ministers with hunches are something I listen to."

"Not a hunch. I've been doing some thinking, that's all. Political thinking. It's what I'm allegedly paid for." Mr. Palliser rubbed his chin. "It's a very unusual set-up, quite a change from the orthodox fuss about some secret. Gorjan hasn't got one—we all seem agreed on that. What he does have is an outstanding position in the world of radar, and radar today means early warning first. And missile-interference afterwards. A real breakthrough in either would be worth a thousand rockets. We're none of us saying Gorjan has got it, but we're all of us accepting that his reputation justifies the fear he might."

"I notice you said 'the fear.' Who's fearing?"

"You're remarkably quick, so ask yourself this. Which side in the East/West balance of terror would press the buttons first? There's something they call first strike, I think. Whose strategy *dictates* first strike? And who would most suffer if it wasn't as effective as the button-pushers had gambled on?"

There was a considerable silence; finally Russell said, "So the attempt to kill Gorjan was an attempt to *deny*. 'Denial to the enemy'—that was the Army phrase for it."

"There was another convenient cliché—exploitation."

"Ye—es. Which the side with the overwhelming counter-strike but strategically on the defensive would just as logically be interested in—interested *to use Gorjan* instead of killing him. I agree with that as argument, but do you think in practice they—the U.S.A. for example—would go after it?"

"I think they've already started." The Minister paused. "Have you heard of a man called Mellion Lee?"

"I've met a Mellion Lee at the American Embassy. He was Counsellor (Scientific)." The brackets were ironically made audible. "A tall man in English clothes but with all the right Washington connections."

"You don't sound as though you liked him."

"I like Americans but I like them American. This one's been here too long."

Palliser said thoughtfully, "I'm not sure you're wholly right. He may fancy our tailors but he hasn't gone Anglophile. You know these New England brahmins. They're deceptively British till there's a straight clash of interests, then they'll put you against the wall without apology. So I've met Lee socially more often than you, and he rang me up last night." Palliser smiled wryly. "Officially it was a private call but in practice it certainly wasn't. Lee was talking about Gorjan, and in effect he congratulated us on Gorjan's breakdown. He'd be here for some time by all accounts, and perhaps we had ideas for using it. Then Lee talked about other things a bit, things where they hold the screw on us. He did it very well indeed—nothing he'd mind a tape of if I'd happened to be taking one. I wasn't. But he made himself perfectly clear. They wanted their piece of anything Gorjan gave us—or else."

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"But what could Gorjan give us?"

"Nothing. Naturally, I'd thought of it—in principle, I mean. But it simply isn't on. The man's a communist, a patriot too. He may not love the Russians and I suspect he loathes their guts, but that doesn't mean he'd work for us. We're decadent West like the others. What could we do, in any case? He isn't a man to bribe, and I'm sure he wouldn't frighten. And the least hint that we were squeezing him and they'd move him elsewhere tomorrow."

"Lee must know that."

"I dare say he does. What he rang me for was to stake their claim on anything we might happen to stumble on. In our lackadaisical English way. But that doesn't exclude that they'll also act directly. This Lee's on the List as Counsellor (Scientific). What would you think that means?"

"Probably more than usual. He's a Counsellor by right and rank and we know he's had some sort of scientific background. The usual form is to hire some fourth-rate scientist and tag him as a diplomat. Lee's more effective than that."

The Minister frowned. "Effective enough to start something?"

"The word I don't like is 'start.' They could make an appalling mess of it. They could land us all in international queer street."

"Russell, you read my thoughts. You're a pleasure to do business with."

"But I'm not very sure I can help you."

"I just thought you should know of it. You can tell me things when you fancy it and when you don't you needn't." The Minister smiled again, not wryly now. "I know you don't always bother me and I'm telling you I accept it."

Charles Russell had gone back to the Security Executive but not at once to work . . . What a card to come up in a nice quiet game! Killing he knew about and secrets too. Secrets meant spying, squalid more often than conventionally exciting chases across the bad lands after what were called the papers. But this wasn't a secret, it was Gorjan's *mind*. That went with a body, so those who wished to destroy the mind need only destroy the man. That was simple—old hat. But those who planned *to exploit the mind* must first control the body.

Russell sat down at his desk again. He'd been thinking in his accustomed terms, of a counter-operation against an all too familiar enemy. Now he didn't have an enemy, only his country's allies and they scared him. They'd go after Gorjan. They wouldn't try to kill him—a radar man dead was unexploitable. They'd go for his mind, landing us all "in international queer street . . ."

There was an official transatlantic Intelligence Agency of matchless resources and competence. Russell respected it, playing ball happily with its London representative. But this wasn't the Agency but a politically-connected diplomat. This was going to be something the Executive called the *Embassy amateurs*.

What he would be faced with was precisely what scared him

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most—amateurs were incalculable—but at least he could foresee a move ahead, even if he could do nothing to prevent it. It was unlikely that Lee would move in on Gorjan directly. The two men had never met, so a call at the Hemmingway with good wishes or whisky would be excessively clumsy even for a diplomat. But somehow Lee must contact him, and it was Russell's guess that he would use the opening lying ready to his hand. For Mellion Lee's father owned a chain of newspapers. Burger-Lee was an excellent businessman. So they'd ask for an interview, an exclusive probably, and they'd play it on from there.

There were a dozen possibilities, once contact had been made. Russell could block some of them or Palliser could block for him, but neither could prevent the original lead. Not for the first time Russell would have to wait. Practice had made him good at it . . .

Nikola Mitrovic was less so. He had just received a telegram instructing him that Dr. Gorjan was to give an exclusive interview to the representative of a chain of American newspapers, and his immediate emotion had been anger. Frustration too, since in the last resort it wasn't an instruction which he could query and hope to be listened to. He had made discreet inquiries from the Hemmingway Hospital and, though Alexander Gorjan wasn't anything like as well as he seemed to feel, no doctor had been prepared to say that an interview with a reporter would actively endanger him.

The ambassador had less than Russell's information but he did have a nose for danger, and his instinct told him that the affair was of ill omen. Mitrovic wasn't afraid that Gorjan would give anything away—he was much too clever and much too well-disciplined; Mitrovic was afraid of he knew not what.

Which would cut no ice at home. To begin with he was in an awkward position personally. They had impressed on Mitrovic that if Starc disappeared in London, an invaluable lead would disappear with him, so the ambassador was to hold the position quietly till a specialist in defectors could arrive to resolve it. But it hadn't worked out like that.

Instead the embassy was on the horns since its official story was one of total ignorance why Starc should have chosen to absent himself. No other was possible publicly.

His country was communist but it wasn't a Satellite, and it was a major interest of the West that it shouldn't become one. Much flowed from that, including money. Mostly it was given with a freedom which Mitrovic thought naive, but he wasn't ignorant about the newspaper empire which had been specified in the instructions sent him. Which wasn't naive at all. Old Burger-Lee was a powerful man who could go to the top and talk there. Evidently he had done so. He would have said that with all those dollars propping the Confederacy surely it was outrageous that papers which earned their share of them should be treated like some London rag. And think of whom they rooted for.

Mitrovic knew that the arguments wouldn't sound unreasonable and clearly they had been listened to. If he protested there would

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be pressures and counter-pressures, phone calls half across the world, more awkwardness for Mitrovic. Who simply couldn't afford it. He groaned but he picked up the telephone. He'd have to explain to Gorjan.

Alexander Gorjan was feeling very well again. He was finding life in the decadent West unexpectedly pleasant. The hospital was comfortable, though the doctors who visited him seemed absurdly evasive, given to answers which weren't answers at all and to brisk bright smiles which annoyed him. But he could see that they knew their business, and when he tried to bully them they slapped him down firmly. He respected that. Every day he felt stronger. The West was treating him well. This was a capitalist society showing him its best side. Dialectic apart, he might as well enjoy himself.

He was doing so as the telephone by his bedside interrupted him. He rose from the armchair, pushing the black nurse away, swearing softly. The oath had been a mild one for the call was no disaster. The nurse wouldn't leave him simply because a telephone had rung. He gave her a backward glance as he walked to the table. She had settled in her chair again. She looked half asleep, perhaps she was. She had a talent for sleep and others. He took up the receiver.

"Alexander Gorjan? It's Mitrovic here."

"It's kind of you to ring again." They had been talking that morning.

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" I hope you're going to think so. There's something I want you to do. I want you to talk to a newspaper."

" But you expressly warned me not to. Your orders were to kick them out."

" This is rather a special newspaper."

" And why? "

Nikola Mitrovic said carefully, " To begin with, it isn't English."

" I see . . . At least I think I do. Then I suppose it's an interview. I imagine you've had instructions."

" Yes. Something they call a profile. I needn't say it won't be technical, and I've an undertaking you won't be asked about what happened at the Circle. A lot of personal background and some sentiment—you know the mixture. Your boyhood, the joys of Cambridge. Then work and ideals. Go easy on your hobbies, though. Oh, and the resorts along the coast aren't doing quite as well as we expected. Give them a push-along."

" If that's what you really want . . ."

" We really want."

There was the faintest emphasis on " We," and Alexander Gorjan caught it.

" And by the way, there's one bright spot. The interviewer's called Margaret Palfrey. That makes her a woman."

Gorjan said contentedly, " I've got one."

Half an hour later a typescript translation of this conversation was on Russell's desk.

He read it, smiling, remembering that only a few months ago a Minister had made a statement about wire-tapping. Security was sufficiently difficult without having its hands tied. Russell took risks but considered he was paid for it. One of them was that he could be thrown to the wolves tomorrow. Nobody would defend him and he didn't expect it. There would be another hat on the elaborate bentwood hatstand but the Security Executive wouldn't change much.

He read the typescript without surprise. This was Move One, the approach by newspaper, but he was puzzled by the choice of interviewer. A woman, Margaret Palfrey. The Executive, he fancied, had a file on Margaret Palfrey. He sent for it and began to read.

The filing system in the Executive had only one equal and that was in Washington. Each file had a cover in one of three colours. Red was suspect by history or by positive association; green was suspect by known political sympathy; and yellow was suspect by character, mostly silly. Margaret Palfrey, once yellow, was now a green, and the summary was written in the style peculiar to the Executive, something between the aseptic impersonality of an entry in *Who's Who* and an obituary notice by a write-up man who had been given the sack unjustly and had resented it. But whatever the manner, the précis on the left-hand side was accurate. So, to her disadvantage, was the photograph.

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Margaret Palfrey. b. 11th August 1922, o.c. of Solomon Loeb of Manchester. Solomon Loeb was second generation English and made a good deal of money in cotton. Lady Margaret Hall, where everybody expected her to get a First except her tutor. Later qualified as a doctor but never practised. Subsequently drifted into journalism, novels, broadcasting. Her actual position in that world is difficult to assess. Several novels which had some succès d'estime but no real sales which we have been able to discover. Is sufficiently well considered in the snootier sort of journalism to interview the anti-novelist of the moment at a literary society, but her rate per written word we cannot guess. (For means of livelihood, below.) Overt member of various organisations which plague us, and secret member of most others which do more, except the one which *matters*. Presumably discipline is distasteful. Married (1) 1945, John Evans Carr, another doctor. Divorced her, minimum period. Wrote an unkind book about him. Married (2) February 1949, in Nigeria, one Charley Rosiji who (March 1949) took to the bush and stayed there. No book about that. Divorced him for desertion. Married (3) 1960, Richard Palfrey, aged 74, a retired Inspector of Taxes. Who was reputed to be fairly well off but had children by a previous marriage. Will was contested but unsuccessfully. Some honey for widow but very little.
No issue by any union.
Has since lived on men and occasional fees from writing and broadcast criticism. Not important enough to be watched regularly, but some of her men are. A list of her known protectors is at Appendix A. But it is suggested that there have been other razors in the bathroom.

Charles Russell turned to Appendix A. It was a list of eight names and he read seven without surprise. The seven he could have guessed correctly—the fine flower of a world it was his business to know about. At the eighth he stopped abruptly, reading it again . . . Mr. Mellion Lee of the American Embassy.

That was something more than interesting, it was beginning to click together. Mellion Lee was known to dabble in what he would call the arts, and there were people who wouldn't have flinched from calling Margaret arty. No doubt it was unwise to have chosen a fellow-traveller as a mistress—there was something known as guilt by association—but perhaps he had never realised just how tarred with that brush she was. Or perhaps he had simply risked it. He was a very rich man and she still seemed attractive in her toothy, breasty way.

In any case she would have handled him carefully, hiding what would have shocked him, deferring to what she would think of as his absurd provincial prejudices. And once you had a girlfriend who was a literary journalist, what was more natural than to push a job her way, especially when on the face of it she looked a very good

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I JUMPED into the first railway compartment which seemed empty: my eyes fell on a book left on the seat opposite by a previous passenger.

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I took a timetable out of my suitcase and began reading quietly in the manner prescribed, the names of about one hundred railway stations. I observed that; after reading them over a few times, I could recite the whole list off with hardly a mistake. With a little more practice I found I had committed them so completely to memory that I could remember them in the reverse order and even pick out one station from the list and say which number it was, and what were the names of the towns before and after it.

I was astonished at the memory I had acquired and spent the rest of my journey on more and more difficult experiments in memory, and reflecting how this new control I was achieving over my mind would materially help me to a greater success in life. After this, I worked hard at this wonderful memory system, and within a week I found I could recall passages from books and quote them with ease; names, addresses and business appointments were remembered immediately and in four months I had succeeded in learning Spanish.

If I have obtained from life a measure of wealth and happiness, it is to that book I owe it, for it revealed to me the workings of my brain.

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choice indeed? Gorjan was a communist, so you couldn't send just anyone to talk to him, somebody who might foam or freeze when the talk came round to communism. You'd have to choose with sympathy.

Charles Russell laughed aloud. That wouldn't have been bad reasoning but he knew it was mistaken. He had met enough communists to know one thing for certain: intellectual I efties were beneath despising.

He lit a pipe, considering his counter-move. Gorjan wouldn't have agreed without his ambassador's sanction; so clearly Mitrovic had given it. He picked up his telephone, telling his secretary to get him the embassy. "Say it's Charles Russell and I want to speak personally."

Mitrovic was on the line at once. He said with a hint of anxiety, "You'd like me to come and see you?"

"Not at the moment thank you. But there's something you could do for me."

"So?"

"I'd like to meet Dr. Gorjan. Just a visit of courtesy."

There was a moment of hesitation before Mitrovic said deliberately, "You're not holding out on me? Nothing has happened?"

"Nothing to Gorjan. Did you expect it?"

His Excellency didn't answer but seemed satisfied. "A visit of courtesy? That's really very kind of you."

Russell sent for his car, telling the driver to take him to the Hemmingway Hospital. He sat in the Humber happily, for meeting Gorjan was something he had been looking forward to . . .

He ran up the steps of the Hemmingway, astonishingly agile for his sixty years. He filled in a form in duplicate, but smiling pleasantly, bottling his rage. An attendant took the forms away and, after ten minutes, another appeared. Russell went up in a lift with him, and on the landing there was a third attendant. There was a brief consultation, resentful and grudging. Clearly this was irregular and that was bad. But they'd had their instructions and that was worse. It was too early for regular visiting hours but they'd been told to admit him. Told! This was an imposition and they showed it. One of them nodded up the corridor. "Number ten," he said sourly, "left." He didn't move to accompany Russell.

Russell walked along the corridor and knocked. Nobody answered. He knocked again, a little louder. Nothing again. He hesitated, then opened the door quietly, peeping in. There were two people there, one black, one white, and neither had even noticed him.

A second later he was back in the corridor. He was conscious that he was blushing . . .

He blew his nose thoughtfully, then went downstairs again. He found his car and told the driver to take him to a modest pub in Egham. He had an appointment there with Oliver Copeman, and in a free and democratic country just twenty minutes left of

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drinking-time. Copeman had been quietly planted in the Hemmingway, something between a nightwatchman and a handyman. By day there were other arrangements, but Russell slept the sounder for the knowledge of Copeman at night. He was an admirable officer, resourceful and brave, and if he had a failing it was a certain stolidity; he liked a simple situation simply presented . . . Tell him that you had just interrupted a scene you couldn't remember hindering since you'd turned a machine-gun on a platoon of the Foreign Legion allegedly liberating a Sicilian village? Copeman would make a note of it; he wouldn't comment. Then tell him about Appendix A, eight gentlemen friends in fewer years. Hint that there had been casuals too. Then say that the lady would be calling on Gorjan at six. Who seemed to have made a remarkable recovery. He seemed almost back to form again . . . What form? Oh, never mind.

Copeman would make another note and then he'd ask for orders.

Fair enough, Russell thought—what orders? He'd been presented with a line—Gorjan, Margaret Palfrey, back to Mellion Lee. It was nothing very definite but he couldn't afford to lose it.

Russell walked into the Private Bar, and Copeman rose to meet him. Russell bought drinks and they sat by the window and finished them.

At last he said, "Will you be on duty at six o'clock?"

"Not exactly on duty. I come on at nine and go off at seven, but in practice I start much earlier. They think I'm after the overtime, but in fact there's a gap."

"A gap?"

"In cover, I mean—on Gorjan's room. The attendants keep civil service hours, which means they go off at five for five-thirty, and the nurse leaves at six. There's a night nurse for the wards, of course, but in the bigwigs' corridor they don't lay one on unless it's necessary. Now Gorjan's much better so he only has a day nurse. A blackie, she is, and very nice too."

"So I gathered."

"Sir?"

"Never mind. So you patrol Gorjan's corridor?"

Copeman said cautiously, "I wouldn't say patrol, sir. I've work to do, the boilers and so on, but I do keep an eye on it. Regularly."

"Nobody else would be around at six?"

"It's very unlikely. Supper comes up at seven."

An hour, Russell thought—that would be plenty. "There's a lady calling on Dr. Gorjan at six."

Copeman asked sharply, "She's dangerous?"

"Not to Gorjan, or not directly. But she's important to us—a lead. I don't want to lose it and we might if there's a scene."

"A scene, sir?"

"An interruption."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Precisely nothing."

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Oliver Copeman made a note in a neat leather pocket book. Russell peeped at it, unashamed. It read simply, DO NOTHING. Russell said suddenly, " I imagine you think I'm mad."

" Oh no, sir, not all all, sir."

" I wouldn't dare blame you. Listen, Copeman, you may hear sounds of a scuffle, cries. Cries for help."

" Cries for help, sir. Yes, sir."

" Pitiful female cries. Later the cries will diminish. Other sounds will replace them. Cries again, but different. You are a married man."

" I am."

" If I may ask it—happily? "

" Four children and one coming, sir."

" Then I make myself clear? "

" You do."

Margaret Palfrey drove back to Mellion Lee's flat in the car which he had lent her. She hadn't been there often, for Lee never asked her when he had diplomatic or business friends. She knew he had the rich man's itch to live in more worlds than one, the professional man's caution in keeping them well apart. She wasn't surprised and she wasn't resentful; she privately admired his solid sense. Mellion shouldn't have been born rich for he'd have been happy making money. Making his own way would have fulfilled him. Perhaps that was the key to him. Lee was a diplomat but his talents weren't diplomatic. Such a life, for a Lee, could be dangerously frustrating. One day he'd break in surprising action.

And where did she herself come in? As a woman she didn't. Keeping a mistress proved something. Not what he wished to prove, but part of it.

Mellion Lee poured drinks. " Could I see your notes, please? "

She considered him as he read them. He wasn't bad looking in his hungry way. His hair had gone grey but he still kept all of it, and he hadn't an ounce of fat on him. He had always been very generous. Of course! A Lee couldn't risk the appearance that he was tight with cash, much less that he was short of it.

He now said warmly, " But these are very good indeed. Congratulations."

" Thank you."

He was silent again and she didn't interrupt him. He had a deliberate mind and he liked to concentrate: break in on his thinking and he'd flare in irritation. He was thinking that the affair was going well. A very important visitor to London, a friend of his father, had sent for him and had talked about Alex Gorjan. The visitor had been discreet but his basic intention obvious. Gorjan was in England and the English weren't exactly notable for seeing an opportunity and exploiting it. But if he could be persuaded to come to America. Yes, persuaded. This wasn't a job for official Intelligence. They were in the doghouse. And naturally success would be a considerable feather in Lee's cap. He'd been

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left in London rather a long time, and it was the visitor's impression that promotion and a better post wouldn't be hard to arrange. . . . So persuasion, the visitor said, though of course there were several sorts of it. Well, there you are. Good luck.

Lee hadn't been tempted by the prospect of promotion, indeed he had hidden a private smile at the innocence which assumed it. In fact he'd come near the dusty end of work which had never absorbed him. But though he wasn't ambitious as a diplomat he shared the prejudices of his colleagues. And the chief was to fear the Agency. He had flown back to Washington a few months before and the drawing-rooms had been buzzing waspishly. It was intolerable that policy should apparently be made by an organisation responsible to nobody.

Lee had been running the fashionable line of critical opposition and had earned himself a snub he wasn't used to. It had been a very old gentleman and he had listened with the patience of the old . . . Had Mr. Lee finished what he wished to say? He had? Then he would permit him to put on record that Mr. Lee was an ass. The old gentleman had been acid and he had used a most frightening word. These opinions were un-American and for two bits he'd report them. If he had needed two bits.

Mellion Lee had discovered he didn't. He had a proper respect for money and the old gentleman's money was even bigger than his own. Moreover it was older. The gaffe had annoyed him but it hadn't changed his mind. Old fogies might speak for the Agency still—but good citizens must clip its too potent wings.

Mellion Lee rose thoughtfully, pouring more drinks. Back in his chair he said, " Then it went off all right with Gorjan? "

" Yes," Margaret Palfrey said, " I liked him."

" Do you think he liked you? "

" I'm sure."

" Then I shall follow this up. I'd like you to introduce me to Gorjan. I'll cable your article and we'll say that my father was so impressed he insisted on my meeting him."

" Won't it look a bit odd? "

" Perhaps, but I can ride it. I'll go on about my father. I'll say he's a tyrant and wouldn't take no." He was, Lee thought, at that. His father was ashamed of him—diplomacy didn't produce things. One day he'd show him.

" But why do you want to meet Gorjan? "

He hesitated. " I'm going to ask him to the cottage."

" Whatever for? " Margaret Palfrey was astonished. Gorjan was a communist and Lee an American. There was much which she must hide from him herself. She said again, " What for? "

" We've business to discuss, that's all."

Margaret concealed a sardonic smile. She was remembering he was a diplomat and they loved their little mysteries. " And how will you fix the visit? "

" In the same way I fixed your interview. Through Father."

Margaret Palfrey went sourly silent. What a world. A very

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rich country and rather a poor one. A newspaper proprietor, his papers supporting the administration of the moment, close to the big men . . . She wasn't surprised by what Lee told her since it fitted her preconceptions. That was how they ran things.

. . . Not for much longer.

But he was speaking again. "And I'd like you to come down too." Unmistakably it had been an instruction. Margaret Palfrey thought of herself as the contemporary free woman and a free woman must at once resent an order.

She said coolly, "You would?"

"I would."

"If you're thinking of the doctoring, I'm hardly that now. Suppose he has another stroke?"

"You'll be plenty good enough—for what I want."

She looked at him quickly, suddenly attentive.

Now she was staring. *This was a Mellion Lee she'd never seen.*

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★ ***The second part of The Antagonists by William Haggard appears in next month's Argosy on sale December 10***

SOLUTION TO THE CASE OF THE HORSE DOPER IN NOVEMBER ARGOSY

The pattern in the hidden words is 1234, thus:

12341	23412	34123	41234	12341	23412
SWING	TABLE	AFTER	BLACK	HEATH	ABOVE
ROYAL	TOWER	WEALD	NINTH	FIRST	KNIFE
MOTIF	SPENT	EMPTY	EVENT	OFTEN	DOWEL
OPENS	PENCE	ABOUT	SLACK	ROOKS	LADEN
DOPED	MERIT	PLANE	SLACK	RENEW	CACTI
FLOUR	WHITE	INDEX	NORTH	STILE	TRAIN
PUNTS	OCTET	STING	SHOWN	CANED	PASTE
EXTOL	BEAMS				

And the message reads:

STABLEBOY WANTS FIFTY TO DOPE
BLOOD PRINCE WIRE INSTRUCTIONS TOM

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 136

Across. 1, *Blue murder.* 6, *Isis.* 10, *Gestalt.* 11, *Brocade.* 12, *Humps.* 13, *Herculean.* 14, *Tunis.* 16, *Alabaster.* 18, *Carriages.* 19, *Ebbed.* 21, *Engrained.* 24, *Reels.* 25, *Corelli.* 26, *Tambour.* 27, *Trek.* 28, *Ramshackle.*

Down. 1, *Big shot.* 2, *Ursa minor.* 3, *Means.* 4, *Retch.* 5, *Ember days.* 7, *Shape.* 8, *Sterner.* 9, *Populate.* 15, *Spiracle.* 16, *Argentina.* 17, *Table-book.* 18, *Crewcut.* 20, *Deserve.* 22, *Gorge.* 23, *Dates.* 24, *Rumba.*

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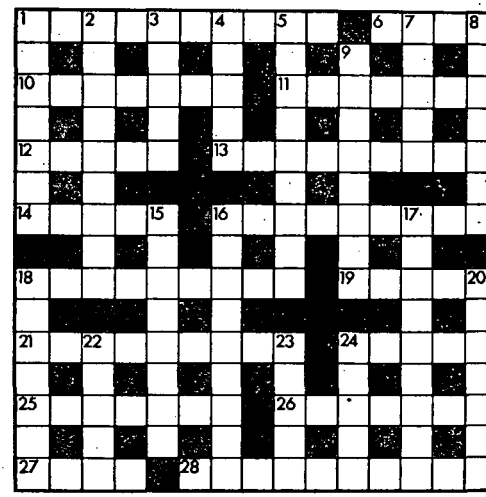

ACROSS

1 Outcry over death of varsity sportsman? (4, 6).

6 River is duplicated (4).

10 At last get organised —psychologically (7).

11 Low type in tatty robe is Indian material (7).

12 Vexes with hunches? (5).

13 Her copper's thin but very strong! (9).

14 Large cask is in north Africa (5).

16 A small laboratory flower becomes soft mineral (9).

18 Bearings for vehicles (9).

19 Retired by the sea? (5).

21 Dyed-in-the-wool (9).

24 Winds the river fish (5).

25 Novelist whose heart is her head (7).

26 Drum found in a tomb broken into at Ur (7).

27 Going from Johannesburg to Durban? (4).

28 Sheep's feathers? Crazy! (10).

DOWN

1 V.I.P. Bertha? (3, 4).

2 Little polar bear? (4, 5).

3 Intends to get the required funds (5).

4 Strain to hear the miserable one! (5).

5 Hold fast on these occasions (5, 4).

7 "Take any —— but that" (*Macbeth*) (5).

8 More rigorous when further behind? (7).

9 Is quiet work the fashion with backward people? (8).

15 Breathing-space (8).

16 Silver in a South American country (9).

17 Ornamental tome and ready reckoner? (5-4).

18 Hairstyle much affected by sailors (7).

20 Be worthy of tennis delivery! (7).

22 Stuff the throat (5).

23 Times of fruitfulness? (5).

24 Dance that's odd to a degree! (5).

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